

## The Cross of Jesus Christ

*"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*

Hebrews 9:11-15

Our understanding of salvation in the Old Testament anticipates the cross of Jesus Christ as the central focus of biblical revelation and of history. Consideration of this topic yields a deep sense of inadequacy and appreciation for the grace of God. In spite of the thousands of books, sermons, and songs about the cross, we are drawn more to silence than to verbage.

The cross is absolutely crucial to all of Christian theology. P. T. Forsyth writes, "Christ is to us just what his cross is. All that Christ was in heaven or on earth was put into what he did there . . . Christ, I repeat, is to us just what his cross is. You do not understand Christ till you understand his cross."<sup>1</sup> Emil Brunner writes similarly,

The Cross is the sign of the Christian faith, of the Christian Church, of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. . . . The whole struggle of the Reformation for the *sola fide*, the *solī deo gloria*, was simply the struggle for the right interpretation of the Cross. He who understands the Cross aright—this is the opinion of the Reformers—understands the Bible, he understands Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

What this means is that the cross of Jesus Christ involves more than just soteriology. Alister McGrath writes,

All too often the cross is treated as something of importance in relation to the initiation or inauguration of the Christian life, but which exercises no subsequent influence over that life. Yet the cross does not merely establish the starting point of the Christian life, it shapes our understanding of its nature and purpose, and the manner in which God is present and active in his world and our lives.<sup>3</sup>

Though the enormity of this topic cannot be overstated, limitations of space and time demand that we focus on specific soteriological aspects of the work of our Savior.

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<sup>1</sup>P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (1909), 44-45, in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 43.

<sup>2</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (1927), 435, in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 44.

<sup>3</sup>Alister McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross*, 187.

## **Background to the Atonement**

When we talk about "the Atonement," we are referring to the entire work of Christ on the cross, which Berkhof rightly calls "the heart of the gospel."<sup>4</sup> The nature of that work will serve as our primary focus, but it can only be properly understood in the light of several important concepts. The Atonement has its foundation in the love of God and its standard in the holiness of God. It is designed to counter the problem of mankind's sinfulness, and it could take place only through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

### **1. Foundation: The Love of God**

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*

John 3:16

*"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."*

1 John 4:10

*"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

Romans 5:8

John Calvin appropriately saw the free love of God in Jesus Christ as the starting point for the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on John 3:16, he described God's love as "the first cause and as it were source of our salvation." Similarly, in his commentary on Hebrews 2:9, Calvin wrote "the ground of our redemption is that immense love of God towards us by which it happened that He did not even spare His own Son."<sup>6</sup>

### **2. Standard: The Holiness of God**

An emphasis on the love of God in contemporary theology has frequently resulted in a neglect of His holiness and justice. As will be demonstrated in the notes that follow, the Atonement is an expression both of God's love and of His justice. He never ceases to be loving, but He also never ceases to be holy, and God's holiness establishes a standard which only the Atonement can satisfy. As Berkouwer notes, "in the cross of Christ God's justice and love are *simultaneously* revealed."<sup>7</sup> This is what some have called "the holy love of God."

The cross says something fundamental about God – that He is loving and just. At the same time, it says something fundamental about us – that we are sinful.

### **3. Problem: The Sinfulness of Humanity**

An earlier lesson has already discussed the sinfulness of humanity in detail, but it is important to mention at this point because it is our sinfulness that occasioned the loving sacrifice

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<sup>4</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 367.

<sup>5</sup>Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted by Robertson, *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>7</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Work of Christ*, 277, in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 131.

of the Savior. Stott is correct when he writes, "The reason why many people give the wrong answers to questions about the cross, and even ask the wrong questions, is that they have carefully considered neither the seriousness of sin nor the majesty of God."<sup>8</sup> Pink's perspective is similar:

An inadequate conception of the terrible enormity of sin necessarily results in a faulty view of the Atonement. In reading through scores of books which were written at varying intervals during the last four hundred years, we have been struck by the fact that side by side with the modifying of the immeasurable heinousness of sin there has been a whittling down of the most essential features comprised in the character of Christ's redemptive work. The more lightly sin be regarded, the less will appear the need for such a stupendous undertaking as that which the Son of God entered upon and triumphantly carried through. Sin is an evil of *infinite* magnitude, for it is committed against an *infinite* Person, unto whom every creature is under infinite obligations of rendering unceasing and joyful obedience.<sup>9</sup>

Stott writes once again,

All inadequate doctrines of the atonement are due to inadequate doctrines of God and man. If we bring God down to our level and raise ourselves to his, then of course we see no need for a radical salvation, let alone for a radical atonement to secure it. When, on the other hand, we have glimpsed the blinding glory of the holiness of God, and have been so convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit that we tremble before God and acknowledge what we are, namely 'hell-deserving sinners', then and only then does the necessity of the cross appear so obvious that we are astonished we never saw it before.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Prerequisite: The Incarnation

Anselm (c. 1033-1109) argued that the Atonement would not be possible apart from the Incarnation.<sup>11</sup> He maintained that humanity's sin had offended the honor of God, incurring a debt that could not be satisfied unless "there is someone who pays to God, for mankind's sin, something greater than every existing thing besides God."<sup>12</sup> Since only God Himself can surpass everything that isn't God, Anselm argued that only He could pay the debt of honor incurred by humanity's sin.

At the same time, Anselm recognized that the debt was mankind's alone. "Only a man ought to make this satisfaction. For in any other case it would not be man who makes it."

If only God could pay the necessary price to atone for sin, and only a human should pay that price, then only one who is both divine and human can. As Anselm wrote, it would be impossible for someone who was only divine or only human to serve as the Savior.

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<sup>8</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 89.

<sup>9</sup>Pink, *The Satisfaction of Christ*, 56.

<sup>10</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 109.

<sup>11</sup>The argument had been used as early as Athanasius (c. 296-373), but Anselm is known for its clearest statement. Cf. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 130-34.

<sup>12</sup>Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, 2.6.

For the one who is divine will not do it, because He will not be under obligation to do it; and the one who is human will not do it, because he will not be able to do it. Hence, in order that a God-man will do this, it is necessary that one and the same [individual] be fully divine and fully human, so as to make this satisfaction. For only one who is truly divine can make satisfaction, and only one who is truly human ought to make it. Therefore, since it is necessary to find a God-man who retains the integrity of both natures, it is no less necessary that these two integral natures conjoin in one person . . . for otherwise it is impossible that one and the same [individual] be fully divine and fully human.<sup>13</sup>

We see this same emphasis in Calvin's theology. In a chapter titled, "Christ Had to Become Man in Order to Fulfill the Office of Mediator," Calvin presents the same argument (though he speaks of God's offended righteousness and the penalty of sin instead of God's offended honor and the debt incurred through sin).

For the same reason it was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man. It was his task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was his task to conquer sin. Who but very Righteousness could do this? It was his task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world or air could do this? Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone? Therefore our most merciful God, when He willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son.

The second requirement of our reconciliation with God was this: that man, who by his disobedience had become lost, should by way of remedy counter it with obedience, satisfy God's judgment, and pay the penalties for sin. Accordingly, our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and the name of Adam in order to take Adam's place in obeying the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgment, and, in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved. In short, since neither as God alone could he feel death, nor as man alone could he overcome it, he coupled human nature with divine that to atone for sin he might submit the weakness of the one to death; and that, wrestling with death by the power of the other nature, he might win victory for us. <sup>14</sup>

Leon Morris also emphasizes the importance of the incarnation, but focuses on the fact that salvation would not truly be a work of God without it. He writes, "Unless Jesus was fully God, our salvation did not originate from God. Rather it would have been wrung from Him."<sup>15</sup> In the cross of Christ, God both originated and accomplished our salvation.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 2.7.

<sup>14</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.12.3. For further discussion of Calvin's emphasis on the incarnation relative to the Atonement, see Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 11-26.

<sup>15</sup>Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 372.

## Summary

Without the Incarnation, the Atonement would not have been possible. Without the sinfulness of humanity, it would not have been necessary. Without the holiness of God, it would not have been called for. Without the love of God, it would not have taken place.

### The Biblical Doctrine of the Atonement

The New Testament describes the great significance of Christ's death on the cross in a variety of ways. It would be a mistake to restrict ourselves to any one of these descriptions, just as it would be a mistake to regard them as separate accomplishments. The atonement is a multifaceted work, and we must consider it from a variety of angles in order to better understand its nature.<sup>16</sup>

### Christ Our Substitute

Perhaps the most familiar image of the atonement is that of Jesus Christ as our substitute. We see it in the most basic statement of the gospel, which includes the idea that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3), and in the first public announcement regarding Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

### The Lamb of God

Much has been written regarding the specific origin and meaning of the term "Lamb of God."<sup>17</sup> Some have suggested that this is not the Passover lamb, for that lamb is not described as an offering for sin in Exodus 12. However, it is important to note that the Passover lamb was considered a "sacrifice" and that the people were protected from the wrath of God by its blood (Ex. 12:27). Peter seems to associate Jesus with this lamb (1 Peter 1:18-19), but Paul makes the connection explicit, stating that "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7).

The idea of a sacrificial lamb taking away the sins of others also brings to mind Isaiah 53:7, which speaks of the Suffering Servant as one who bore affliction silently, "like a lamb that is led to slaughter." Isaiah says of the nation Israel, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (v. 6). As the Lamb of God, Jesus was an unblemished lamb dying for stray sheep, rendering Himself as a guilt offering (v. 10) and being "crushed for our iniquities" (v. 5).

The concept of substitution is unmistakable here. He is the Lamb of God who "takes away the sin of the world." It is our sin, but He bears it. As McDonald writes,

There is a whole theology of the atonement in the title *the Lamb of God*. And it cannot be successfully denied that the words which refer the title to Christ, and at the same time ally it with his work of bearing away the sin of the world, give to both title and work a vicarious and sacrificial capacity. Only in a vicarious and sacrificial way can sin be taken away by the Lamb.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Chafer/Walvoord 2:83-86.

<sup>17</sup>For example, see Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, 58-63.

<sup>18</sup>H. D. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 73.

How does such substitution work? What is the role of the sacrificial Lamb? This is perhaps best understood through an examination of another biblical term, propitiation.

### Propitiation

"Propitiation" means to turn away wrath by means of an offering. That is exactly what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. He turned away the wrath of God by offering Himself in our place as an unblemished sacrifice.

The concept of propitiation relies on the Greek word ἰλαεω", which means "kindly" or "gracious." It was occasionally found in connection with the worship of pagan gods, in which the worshipper attempted to "make gracious" the deity. More frequently, the term employed for such activity is the verb ἰλασκεσθαι, which means "to make gracious" or "appease." This is particularly appropriate if the god being referred to is angry with the worshipper. Various acts were performed which were intended to remove the anger of the offended deity.

In the LXX, this verb is used to translate ἱλασκεσθαι, "to make atonement."<sup>19</sup> Link writes, "The important point to note is that . . . the grammatical subject is usually a man (the priest) and the object God."<sup>20</sup> In other words, the priest was performing an act that was intended to make God gracious, to remove His anger.

Some examples of these acts of propitiation may be found in Numbers 16:46-47; 25:1-13; Psalm 106:30; Zechariah 7:2; 8:22 and Malachi 1:9. A helpful example may also be found in the non-religious context of Genesis 32: 20 (21), where Jacob attempts to appease the anger (literally, "make gracious the face") of his brother Esau by giving him many gifts. (Cf. Prov. 16:14; Isa. 47:11; Exod. 32:30; Deut. 32:43; Ezek. 16:39-42; 1 Sam. 26:19.)

As an act of turning away wrath through sacrifice, propitiation can be a relevant soteriological term only if God is thought of as being angry with mankind. Those who emphasize the love of God to the exclusion of His justice will have a difficult time with this concept. For example, Alister Hardy writes,

I cannot accept either the hypothesis that the appalling death of Jesus was a sacrifice in the eyes of God for the sins of the world, or that God, in the shape of his son, tortured himself for our redemption. I can only confess that, in my heart of hearts, I find such religious ideas to be among the least attractive in the whole of anthropology. To me they belong to quite a different philosophy — different psychology — from that of the religion that Jesus taught.<sup>21</sup>

The fact is that God is not simply a God of love. He is also a God of wrath, and His wrath makes forgiveness "the profoundest of problems."<sup>22</sup> In the New Testament, the death of Jesus

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<sup>19</sup>The concept of atonement is based on the same vocabulary as the concept of propitiation. The Hebrew  $\text{כַּפַּר}$  is commonly translated "to cover" based on an Arabic cognate, but this connection is very weak, and the term does not appear to mean "cover" in Hebrew. R. L. Harris argues that there is no basis for the assertion that sin was temporarily "covered" in the Old Testament in anticipation of the death of Christ (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1:453).

<sup>20</sup>*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:149.

<sup>21</sup>Alister Hardy, *The Divine Flame*, 218, in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 111.

<sup>22</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 110.

Christ appeased the anger that God rightly had toward all of sinful humanity.<sup>23</sup> The passages that follow provide clear evidence of this.

**Hebrews 2:17** – "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."

Büchsel maintains that we should not think of Christ's death as an act whereby God was made gracious, because propitiation here is a divine act, not a human one. In other words, God was being gracious in the act, so He could not have been rendered gracious by that act. He maintains that propitiation is simply the removal of sin's significance before God.<sup>24</sup> Noting that the phrase, "the sins of the people," is in the accusative case (often used for the direct object of a verb), Grenz argues "Christ's work is directed toward human sin, not God's wrath."<sup>25</sup> He translates the term "expiation" rather than "propitiation" for this reason, focusing on the removal of sin and the guilt associated with it. However, in the same text, Christ is described as a high priest rendering service to God, a service that is related to the sins of the people and consists of His self offering. For this reason it seems better to see this as a demonstration of grace in which the wrath of God against sin was satisfied by His own action.<sup>26</sup> W. H. Griffith Thomas comments,

God offers to Himself the sacrifice of Christ, so that He is at once the One who propitiates and the One who is propitiated. . . . His justice could not overlook sin and His love could not be indifferent to the sinner, and so what His righteousness demanded, His love provided, and Christ, God's gift to the world, is 'the propitiation for our sins.'<sup>27</sup>

What Thomas is saying here is that the death of Christ is an act whereby *God satisfied Himself*.<sup>28</sup> As Stott writes, "For in order to save us in such a way as to satisfy himself,

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 84.

<sup>24</sup>TDNT, s.v. " ἰλ ἄσκομαι," by F. Büchsel, 3:316

<sup>25</sup>Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 452. Interestingly (and I think rightly), Grenz observes that this is probably an accusative of reference, which weakens his point and suggests that God may yet be the object of Christ's work here.

<sup>26</sup>The debate over "expiation" vs. "propitiation" has been argued much more thoroughly by C.H. Dodd (*Journal of Theological Studies* 32 [1931]: 352-60) and Leon Morris (*The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 125-85). For helpful summaries, see Judith Gundry-Volf, "Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat," in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (IVP, 1993), 279-84 and Colin Brown, "Reconciliation," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3:151-160. Brown summarizes the difference: "propitiation is directed towards the offended person, whereas expiation is concerned with nullifying the offensive act" (151). As the notes suggest, I favor Morris and Brown ("propitiation") over Dodd and Volf ("expiation") because of the biblical emphasis on divine wrath and its association with this term and because "expiation" suggests no alternative mechanism for the removal of sin's consequences.

<sup>27</sup>W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews*, 37

<sup>28</sup>Stott describes the point further when he writes, "To be sure, 'self-satisfaction' in fallen human beings is a particularly unpleasant phenomenon, whether it refers to the satisfying of our instincts and passions or to our complacency. Since we are tainted and twisted with selfishness, to say 'I must satisfy myself' lacks self-control, while to say 'I am satisfied with myself' lacks humility. But there is no lack of self-control or humility in God, since he is perfect in all his thoughts and desires. To say that he must 'satisfy himself' means that he must be himself and act

God through Christ substituted himself for us. Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice."<sup>29</sup>

**1 John 2:2**— ". . . and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

Stott rightly maintains that the need for propitiation is in man's sin and in God's wrath.

It is this divine judgment upon human rebellion which makes the barrier to fellowship with God; and there can be no expiation of man's sin without a propitiation of God's wrath. God's holy antagonism to sin must somehow be turned away if sin is to be forgiven and the sinner restored.<sup>30</sup>

That wrath was borne on the cross, and as a result Jesus remains our eternal Advocate, pleading our case by virtue of His blood shed on our behalf.

Stott again writes, "It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God. . . . His wrath is not averted by any external gift, but by His own self-giving to die the death of sinners. This is the means He has Himself contrived by which to turn His own wrath away."<sup>31</sup>

**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."

Marshall comments, "It is true that some writers have denied that a loving God needs to be propitiated for human sin and have suggested that this makes him less than loving. They have not realized that the depth of God's love is to be seen precisely in the way in which it bears the wounds inflicted on it by mankind and offers full and free pardon."<sup>32</sup>

**Romans 3:25**— ". . . whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

The term employed here (*ἵλασθῆναι*) is rather difficult in that it does not normally refer to the act of propitiation but to the vessels employed in that act.<sup>33</sup> More specifically, it often refers to the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant (as in Hebrews 9:5, its only other occurrence in the New Testament). The link between the general usage and this particular one may be the fact that Christ was the one employed to accomplish propitiation. In that sense, He is the "new place of offering," displayed publicly rather than hidden behind the veil.

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according to the perfection of his nature or 'name'. The necessity of 'satisfaction' for God, therefore, is not found in anything outside himself but within himself, in his own immutable character. The law to which he must conform, which he must satisfy, is the law of his own being" (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 124).

<sup>29</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 159.

<sup>30</sup>Stott, *The Epistles of John*, 87.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>32</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The First Epistle of John*, 215

<sup>33</sup>TDNT, 3:319.



God's righteousness demanded the exercise of His wrath. He previously had "passed over" the sins of humanity, not bringing the type of judgment that His character called for. But now He has exercised that wrath in the person of Christ. As Cranfield writes,

God, because in his mercy he willed to forgive sinful men, and, being truly merciful, willed to forgive them righteously, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against his own very self in the person of his Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which they deserved.<sup>34</sup>

This serves as a demonstration of His righteousness, and it means that God is both just (righteous, not simply overlooking sin) and justifier (making believers righteous through the intervention of Christ).

### Summary

Stott's summary of the concept of propitiation is particularly helpful:

So then, God himself is at the heart of our answer to all three questions about divine propitiation. It is God himself who in holy wrath needs to be propitiated, God himself who in holy love undertook to do the propitiating, and God himself who in the person of his Son died for the propitiation of our sins. Thus God took his own loving initiative to appease his own righteous anger by bearing it his own self in his own Son when he took our place and died for us. There is no crudity here to evoke our ridicule, only the profundity of holy love to evoke our worship.<sup>35</sup>

By bearing the anger that we deserved, Jesus Christ served as our substitute. He experienced the wrath that was meant for us. Again, Stott states it well: "All this means that the simple New Testament statement 'he died for our sins' implies much more than appears on the surface. It affirms that Jesus Christ, who being sinless had no need to die, died our death, the death our sins had deserved."<sup>36</sup>

### **Christ Our Redeemer**

Another familiar image of the Atonement is that of Christ as our Redeemer. This involves two important concepts, redemption and ransom.

### Redemption

"Redemption" (Hebrew:  $\text{ל} \text{א} \text{'} \text{G} \text{:}$ ; Greek:  $\text{ἐ} \text{x} \text{a} \text{g} \text{o} \text{r} \text{a} \text{z} \text{w}$ ,  $\text{a} \text{g} \text{o} \text{r} \text{a} \text{z} \text{w}$ ,  $\text{a} \text{p} \text{o} \text{l} \text{u} \text{t} \text{r} \text{w} \text{s} \text{i}$ ") may be defined as the purchase and subsequent liberation of a slave. Since the buyer must be a third party, this term highlights the fact that we could not deliver ourselves from the bondage of sin.

In the Greek culture, slaves were able to purchase their own freedom by depositing an appropriate amount of money with the cultic priests. Apollo was then regarded as the buyer, or redeemer, but only in name. By contrast, in Christianity Jesus is truly the redeemer in that He is

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<sup>34</sup>Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:217.

<sup>35</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 175.

<sup>36</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 65.

the only one paying a price in the transaction. Several passages may be used to demonstrate this concept.

**1 Corinthians 6:20**— "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

Here the term used is ἀγοράζω, "to purchase." This purchase results not in simple freedom, but in a new obligation. Just as in Romans 6 believers are described as formerly slaves to sin but now slaves to righteousness, so here the Corinthians are reminded that they were formerly "free" to indulge in immorality but now must fulfill their new obligation to Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:23, believers are no longer free to become enslaved to another master, whether that would be a human slaveholder or sin which enslaves. We have been bought, and we are under obligation to present ourselves to our new master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This passage does not describe what we as believers have been purchased from. Paul is focusing on the present obligation of believers. When he focuses on our past, as in the verses below, he uses the term ἐξαγοράζω, meaning to redeem, or to set free.

**Galatians 3:13**— "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us— for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'"

Here the focus is not on the believer's present obligation toward Christ, but on the severance of any obligation toward the Law's curse (cf. v. 10). Just as a slave was "bought out" from slavery, so are believers bought out from obligation toward the penalty of death. Quite clearly, this takes place through the death of Christ on the cross, in which He bore the curse for us.

By bearing the curse of the Law on our behalf, Jesus Christ freed us from having to bear it ourselves. He paid a price that delivered us from our state of obligation. We were unable to escape the penalty, but He paid it, setting us free. The consequence of our redemption in this passage is that we are now able to receive the promise of blessing given to Abraham (v. 14). In 4:5, the consequence of our redemption is that we might be adopted as sons of God.

**Galatians 4:4,5**— "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Here once again the focus is primarily on the believer's past state. We have been purchased from under the Law. Our obligation to the Law has ceased because of the freedom we have received in Christ. As a result, we have been adopted as sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. As verse 7 tells us, "Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

## Summary

Though we were slaves, the fact that we have been redeemed means that we have been purchased out of that slavery and set free from it. At the same time, we have a new obligation to Him who purchased us, that we might live for Him.

It is important to note that the idea of redemption cannot be described as simple "deliverance," a phrase that eliminates the concept of payment. It may be that on occasion the payment is not clearly in view. However, in general there is a payment involved as Christ purchased us for Himself through His death on the cross. This payment idea is even more strongly implied in the biblical use of the term, "ransom," which is closely associated to the concept of redemption.

### Ransom

"Ransom" (Hebrew: לַא' גֹּ; Greek: λυτρον, λυτρω, λυτρωσι, ἀπολυτρωσι) is the payment of a price to set someone free. This concept is so closely associated with redemption that English versions frequently translate "ransom" as "redeem."

In the Old Testament, the "ransom" took on many forms. Individual Israelites were called upon to pay a fee as "a ransom for himself to the Lord . . . that there may be no plague among them" during the census (Exod. 30: 13). They were also told to ransom their first-born sons from death through the offering in their place of (apparently) a lamb (Exod. 13: 13). Here there is no comment about the object of the payment, only the acknowledgment that the payment is made. At times the term does not seem to involve any payment at all, describing God's acts of deliverance without talking about a price having been paid (1 Sam. 14: 45; Jer. 31: 11). Like redemption, ransom can speak metaphorically about deliverance without demanding an actual "payment" in the specific context. In the New Testament, however, it is legitimate to talk about an actual payment that ransoms believers from sin – the death of Jesus Christ.

**Mark 10: 45** – "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

This passage, which is repeated in Matt. 20: 28, emphasizes quite clearly the concept of substitution. Delling writes, "The ransom saying undoubtedly implies substitution. For, even if the ἀπὸ τῆς be translated "to the advantage of," the death of Jesus means that there happens to Him what would have had to happen to the many. Hence He takes their place. The saying plainly looks back to Mk. 8:37 . . . ["what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"]. What no man can do, He, the unique Son of God, achieves."<sup>37</sup>

With the idea of "ransom" in this passage, it is not surprising that many have attempted to identify the *recipient* of the ransom payment. Origen is well known for his "ransom to Satan" theory of the atonement, in which he "understood redemption as the liberation of man from the servitude of the devil by the payment of [a] price to Satan."<sup>38</sup> In his commentary on this passage, Origen wrote, "But to whom did he give his life as the price of redemption for many? Not to God; maybe to the evil spirit? For he was holding us under his power, until Jesus would give his life on our behalf . . ."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, he wrote with regard to Romans 3:24,

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<sup>37</sup>TDNT, 4:343.

<sup>38</sup>Stanislas Lyonnet, *Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study*, Analecta Biblica 48 [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970], 83

<sup>39</sup>Quoted by Lyonnet, *ibid.*

Let us see more attentively what is meant by the redemption which was wrought by Jesus Christ. Redemption is said to be that which is given to the enemies on behalf of those they hold in captivity, so that they may return them to their former state of freedom. Mankind, overcome as it were in war, was held in captivity by the enemies: the Son of God came who gave himself as redemption, that is to say, he surrendered himself into the hands of the enemies, and on behalf of those who longed for his blood, he shed it . . .<sup>40</sup>

Lyonnet finds similar or even more explicit statements in the writings of Ambrose, Jerome, and even Augustine, who wrote, "In this redemption the blood of Christ has been given on our behalf as price; the devil, however, by accepting it, was not made richer but was bound so that we might be freed from his fetters."<sup>41</sup>

Later theologians found it more acceptable to talk about the ransom as a price paid to God the Father. Lombard, writing on this issue in the twelfth century, repeats Augustine's thoughts nearly verbatim except for the idea of a ransom to Satan. He replaces that part of Augustine's argument with the suggestion that "This is the price of our reconciliation which Christ offered to the Father so that he may be appeased."<sup>42</sup> Aquinas also states quite clearly that the price was not paid to the devil, but to God.<sup>43</sup>

We must ask, however, whether or not it is necessary to identify the recipient of a ransom payment in a passage like Mark 10:45. This and other passages that utilize the idea of ransom do not name a recipient of the payment, and it may well be that to think of it in those terms would be stretching the metaphor. At the same time, we do not want to eliminate the concept of payment entirely, as Lyonnet seems to do when he concludes that God "grants freedom for no other reason than because he loves."<sup>44</sup> *If all that was required was God's love, then why did Christ die?*

Jesus' death paid a price that we should have paid. That is the force of the article ἀντί, which here denotes substitution, equivalence, or exchange.<sup>45</sup> Jesus died in our place to satisfy the just demands of a righteous God. He made a "payment" that set us free, and in that sense he "ransomed" us from the penalty of sin.

Several other passages are worth noting in this context:

**Luke 24:21:** "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem [ransom] Israel."

There is much irony in the confusion of these disciples on their way to Emmaus. They said that they had hoped Jesus would redeem Israel, but He had been crucified instead. They did not realize that this was the act whereby redemption was to be accomplished!! That's why Jesus responded to them so strongly, rebuking their ignorance of the Scriptures and proceeding to explain to them how the Christ had to

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>*De Trinitate* 13.15. For excellent criticisms of the ransom-to-Satan theory, see Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 113.

<sup>42</sup>Quoted by Lyonnet, 84.

<sup>43</sup>*Summa Theologica* IIIa, q.48, in Lyonnet, 85

<sup>44</sup>Lyonnet, 103.

<sup>45</sup>*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, s.v. "Matthew," by D. A. Carson, 433.

suffer these things (vv. 25-27, 45-47). The same idea is reinforced in Titus 2:14, which regards an Old Testament promise of redemption (Ps. 130:8) as having been fulfilled by Jesus' sacrificial death: ". . . who gave Himself for us, that HE MIGHT REDEEM [RANSOM] US FROM EVERY LAWLESS DEED AND PURIFY FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION, zealous for good deeds."

This deliverance through Christ's intercession is both accomplished and incomplete, as the following verses demonstrate.

**Romans 3:24:** ". . . being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

**Ephesians 1:7:** ". . . in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace."

In these two passages, note that our deliverance through ransom is a *present* possession, made possible by the grace of God in the death of Christ on the cross.

**Ephesians 4:30:** "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption."

**Romans 8:23:** ". . . awaiting eagerly our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

Here we see that our redemption is not quite complete. Our bodies must still be delivered. Just as the creation itself will be set free from the slavery to corruption that came as a consequence of sin (cf. v. 21), so must our bodies be set free from the continuing reality of death through final physical resurrection. Our security to that point is sure in that we have been sealed by the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, but the salvation that is ours will only then be fully manifested.

Note also the continuing association between adoption and redemption. This highlights the new obligation that comes along with the severance of the old. Of course, this new obligation is of a different nature entirely. "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but a spirit of adoption as sons, through whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom. 8:15).

**1 Timothy 2:5-6**— "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all (ajntivlutron uJpe;r pavntwn), the testimony borne at the proper time."

This passage clearly demonstrates the substitutionary nature of the death of Christ, the payment He provided, and His role as mediator between God and mankind. As the mediator between us and God, He is our peacemaker.

### Christ Our Peace

**Ephesians 2:13-18**— "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one new body to God

through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in One Spirit to the Father."

According to this passage the death of Christ has brought peace in two specific ways. He has provided peace between Jews and Gentiles by removing the barrier of the Law, and He has provided peace between all people and God the Father by removing the barrier of sin. We were separated from God and from one another, but we have been reconciled through the death of Christ.

The term used by the NT writers for "reconciliation" (*katalabsw*) is very rare in the LXX, and the very few examples there are not at all helpful. However, rabbinic literature describes many acts of reconciliation, which serve to remove enmity between two parties. In almost every case, as one would expect, it is the offender who is responsible for righting the wrong.

In the New Testament, the concept of reconciliation is a wonderful demonstration of God's grace. Though He is the offended party, God is consistently portrayed as the one who takes the initiative in making peace. This takes place as He removes the barrier of sin through His death. As Morris comments, "Reconciliation is a homely word for making up after a quarrel. This is brought about by taking away the cause of the quarrel; unless this is done there may be an uneasy truce, but there can be no real reconciliation."<sup>46</sup>

**Romans 5:1, 10, 11** – "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Here God is the one reconciling humanity to Himself through the death of Christ. The enmity which existed between us and God due to our sin has been removed through the death of Christ on our behalf. There once was a barrier of sin between us and God, but Christ's death has provided us with access (Rom. 5: 2; Heb. 4: 16). We were His enemies, but now we have become His friends. (The implication of Rom. 5 is, if we saw that much of His love as enemies, how much more shall we experience as His friends!)

Dunn rightly interprets this in the light of Romans 1-3:

The picture is clearly of a sharp hostility between God and humanity: the human condition independent of God is not simply a state of human weakness, disregard for God, and responsiveness to sin; it is also a state of actual rebellion against the creaturely role of complete dependence on the creator. Man needs to be weaned away from that delusion about 'standing on his own two feet,' which is really nothing more mature than a childish tantrum. Despite the unfamiliarity of the metaphor as applied to divine-human relationships, Paul's readers would clearly understand 'we were reconciled to God' to mean a restoration to man's

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<sup>46</sup>Leon Morris, *The Cross of Jesus Christ*, 6.

proper relationship with God. This is another way of describing what happened through Christ's death.<sup>47</sup>

**2 Corinthians 5:18-20** – "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg on behalf of Christ, "Be reconciled to God."

Note: This translation reflects the fact that there is no object for "beg" in the Greek text. It does not appear as though Paul is begging the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (and with good reason, since they are believers), but is instead continuing to defend and describe his apostolic ministry.

Once again, God is the one acting. He reconciled us to Himself through Christ (note the past tense), and was at the same time accomplishing reconciliation for the entire world (cf. Col. 1: 20-22). That peace has now been provided, but the terms must still be accepted – that's why we act as His ambassadors, appealing on behalf of Him who died that His offer of reconciliation be accepted.

### Christ Our Victor

One of the images of the Atonement that we tend to neglect is that of Christ as the Victor over evil. Consider the following passages:

**Romans 8:31-39** – "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

**1 Corinthians 15:54-57** – "But when this perishable [body] will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

**2 Corinthians 2:14** – "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place."

**Ephesians 1:19-23** – "These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His

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<sup>47</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A, 268. (Cf. page 259, where Dunn rightly argues that the term "reconciliation" should not be sharply distinguished from the other expressions used in this same context. These are different facets of the same gem, not separate works on the part of Christ.)

right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all."

**Philippians 2:8-11** – "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

**Colossians 2:13-15** – "And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

**Revelation 3:21** – "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne."

At the time, the cross did not appear to be a moment of victory. Stott describes the irony of the event well when he writes,

Of course any contemporary observer, who saw Christ die, would have listened with astonished incredulity to the claim that the Crucified was a Conqueror. Had he not been rejected by his own nation, betrayed, denied and deserted by his own disciples, and executed by authority from the Roman procurator? Look at him there, spread-eagled and skewered on his cross, robbed of all freedom of movement, strung up with nails or ropes or both, pinned there and powerless. It appears to be total defeat. If there is victory, it is the victory of pride, prejudice, jealousy, hatred, cowardice and brutality. Yet the Christian claim is that the reality is the opposite of the appearance. What looks like (and indeed was) the defeat of goodness by evil is also, and more certainly, the defeat of evil by goodness. Overcome there, he was himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was himself crushing the serpent's head (Gn. 3:15). The victim was the victor, and the cross is still the throne from which he rules the world.<sup>48</sup>

It is the resurrection, of course, which reveals the cross to be a victorious event. As McGrath notes, "Experience declared that God was absent from Calvary, only to have its verdict humiliatingly overturned on the third day."<sup>49</sup> That's why the cross cannot be separated from the resurrection in a passage like Romans 8:34 – Jesus has not only been crucified, He has been raised, and His resurrection and exaltation demonstrate the decisive victory of the cross.

What was the nature of the battle? What exactly did Christ overcome?

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 declares that He overcame death, sin and the Law. By first fulfilling the Law and then bearing its curse, Christ completely satisfied its demands (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 7:4; Eph. 2:15; Gal. 3:23-25). By bearing the penalty for sin in our place as a vicarious sacrifice, He overcame sin. By satisfying the penalty of death and then rising from the dead, Jesus

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<sup>48</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 227-28.

<sup>49</sup>Alister McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross*, 159.



overcame death.<sup>50</sup> Colossians 2:14 reinforces the idea that His death overcame sin, stating that by it He "cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us" and "took it out of the way."

Colossians 2:15 states that Christ's death also affected the "rulers and authorities." This phrase causes most of us to think immediately of Ephesians 6:12, where the "rulers" and "authorities" are clearly demonic. However, since Paul uses the terms elsewhere to describe earthly rulers (Tit. 3:1), we must be careful not to assume that demonic forces are in view here. 1 Corinthians 15:24 states that Christ will "abolish all rule and all authority and power," and the idea seems to be that any competing authority, whether it be demonic or governmental (or both) will ultimately be brought into submission to Christ.

Paul maintains that Jesus "disarmed" these rulers and authorities at the cross. The word here means "strip," and it is the basis for Delling's comment on 1 Corinthians 15:24, in which he writes, "in the final consummation they will be definitively stripped of all their influence."<sup>51</sup> Like soldiers forced to drop their weapons, spiritual and worldly authorities have been rendered powerless in the presence of the victorious Christ.<sup>52</sup>

The cross brought judgment against Satan as "the ruler of this world" (John 16:11) and was the moment in which Jesus "overcame the world" (John 16:33), but it is the resurrection that Paul refers to in Colossians 2:15 when he says that God "made a public display" of His conquered foes. It seemed that governmental authorities had killed Jesus, that Satan had destroyed His mission, but the resurrection made a mockery of such claims. Jesus Christ now stands as "the head over all rule and authority" (Col. 2:10).

This perspective of the Atonement was featured prominently at different times in the history of the Church. Gustav Aulen has argued that the dominant view of the Atonement in the first 1000 years of the Church was that Christ fought against and triumphed over the evil forces of this world, thereby reconciling the world to Himself.<sup>53</sup> Aulen has probably overstated the case, and he has certainly distinguished too sharply between this and the other perspectives on the Atonement already discussed.<sup>54</sup> However, he is correct in identifying this as an important theme both biblically and historically.

John Calvin frequently wrote of Jesus' victory over the devil, death, sin, and the world, emphasizing the fact that believers now share in His triumph.<sup>55</sup> He followed the idea of Hebrews 2:14, that Christ took on our humanity in order to conquer our enemies and free us from the bondage to which we had been subjected.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>We must note that Paul describes death as the last enemy, which will not be completely vanquished until the general resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22-28). This is a good example of what has been called the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" – the battle has already been won but the consequences are not yet fully experienced.

<sup>51</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. "αρχή" by Gerhard Delling, 1:483-84. It should be noted that Delling emphasizes the demonic aspect of the "rulers" here.

<sup>52</sup>Again, note here the contrast between the "already" and the "not yet." Col. 2:15 puts the victory in past tense, while 1 Cor. 15:24 maintains a future reservation.

<sup>53</sup>Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 4-6.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 228-30.

<sup>55</sup>Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 46-54.

<sup>56</sup>Once again, this perspective underscores the necessity of the Incarnation for the Atonement.

### Christ Our Example

Another legitimate, but frequently overstated, perspective on the Atonement is that Christ serves as our example. Those who underestimate the justice of God too often maintain that Christ's death was *only* an example, and that is a profoundly unbiblical idea. However, it is legitimate to see the cross as an inspiration for human devotion along with the concepts discussed above.

Philippians 2:5-8 uses the humility of Christ's incarnation and death as a model for Christian character, and Hebrews 12:2-3 uses it as a model for perseverance in faith and ministry. The theme is stated clearly in 1 Peter 2:21-25, which reads,

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

As Calvin noted, these texts do not appeal to Christ's example as a pattern or inspiration for justification, but for sanctification.<sup>57</sup> This is an important distinction, one which must be maintained to avoid lessening the value of His death on our behalf. It's also an important lesson, one which we too often forget. Hooker writes, "True disciples of Jesus will still be found, trudging along the road that leads to a cross, following their crucified and risen Lord."<sup>58</sup>

### Summary

We have described several different New Testament images of the Atonement, seeing Christ as our Substitute, our Redeemer, our Peace, our Victor, and our Example. One or another of these themes may provide a more appropriate focus for a particular audience. All of these are important to the biblical doctrine, but the most vital in soteriology is the first that we considered, that Christ offers Himself as an atoning sacrifice, acting on divine love and satisfying divine justice.<sup>59</sup> As believers we have been delivered from the penalty of sin, for God's wrath has been turned aside. Jesus has made atonement for sin. We have been reconciled to God. We have been redeemed. The price has been paid. "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 8:1).

### Historical Models of the Atonement

Many of the different views regarding the death of Jesus have already been noted in some manner, but it's important at this point that we highlight some of the more prominent ideas in order to contrast them to the biblical survey just completed. For the most part, these models result from a lack of appreciation for the severity of sin. If we can save ourselves, then we have no need of a Savior, let alone a divine one.

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<sup>57</sup>Peterson, *Calvin's View of the Atonement*, 77-80.

<sup>58</sup>Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, 67.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Leon Morris, *The Cross of Jesus*, 25.

### Abelard: The Atonement as an Example

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) taught what has come to be known as the Moral Influence theory or the Example theory of the Atonement. He stressed the love of God to such an extent that he neglected God's justice, reducing the death of Christ to an example that is designed to inspire us to love God ourselves. For example, Bernard of Clairvaux quotes him as saying, "I think, therefore, that the purpose and cause of the incarnation was that he [Christ] might illuminate the world by his wisdom and excite it to the love of himself."<sup>60</sup>

Abelard's view of the death of Christ is stated even more clearly in his commentary on Romans, where he writes concerning 3:26,

To us it appears that we are nonetheless justified in the blood of Christ and reconciled to God by this singular grace exhibited to us in that his Son took our nature, and in it took upon himself to instruct us alike by word and example even unto death, and bound us to himself by love; so that kindled by so great a benefit of divine grace, charity should not be afraid to endure anything for his sake: which benefit indeed we have no doubt kindled the ancient fathers also, who expected this by faith, into a supreme love of God no less than the men of [this] time.<sup>61</sup>

McDonald's summary is helpful:

According, then, to Abelard it was the reality of God's love that moved the hearts of those of former days to faith and love. And that love of God exhibited by Christ in his submission to death has increased the potency of that love to move man's hearts, to touch their consciences, and to reform their lives. By this and like statements Abelard was responsible for switching the actuality of the atonement from objectivity in the cross to a subjective influence on the human spirit.<sup>62</sup>

As discussed above, Christ's death is certainly an example, but in the New Testament it is an example for the sanctification of believers. Abelard uses it as an event that moves mankind to love God and "reform their lives." Shedd summarizes the basic problem with this approach, comparing it to Anselm's emphasis on the need to satisfy the offense caused by sin:

We perceive immediately in passing from the writings of Anselm to those of Abelard, that we are in communication with a very different spirit. The lofty heights of contemplation and the abysmal depths of experience have vanished. Attributes like that of justice, and facts like that of sin, are far less transcendent in their meaning and importance. The atonement is looked at from a much lower level.

Abelard begins and ends with the benevolence of God. This is divorced from and not limited by his holiness, and is regarded as endowed with the liberty of indifference. The deity can pardon upon repentance. There is nothing in the Divine Nature which necessitates a satisfaction for past transgression, antecedently to remission of penalty. Like creating out of nothing, redemption may and does take place by a *fiat*, by which sin is abolished by a word, and the sinner is received into favour. Nothing is needed but penitence for the remission of sin. The object of the incarnation and death of Christ, consequently, is to produce sorrow in the human soul. The life and sufferings of the

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<sup>60</sup>Cited by McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 174.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

God-Man were intended to exert a moral impression upon a hard and impenitent heart, which is thereby melted into contrition, and then received into favour by the boundless compassion of God. Abelard attributes much to the intercessory agency of the Redeemer. As the God-Man who has perfectly obeyed the divine law, Christ possesses a weight of influence with the Father which secures blessings for the sinful. In such connections, he alludes to the idea of justice. Christ was perfectly holy and just himself, and it is "just" that such a being should be heard in behalf of those for whom he became incarnate and suffered. But by justice is here meant merely fitness or propriety. When it comes to the properly judicial and retributive attribute in the Divine Nature, Abelard denies the doctrine of satisfaction, and contends that God may remit the penalty by a sovereign act of will.<sup>63</sup>

Hannah provides several helpful criticisms:

- (1) Salvation is based on an emotional attitude, not satisfaction.
- (2) God is imbalanced in His perfection (love only).
- (3) There is no need for Christ's death.
- (4) Abelard demonstrates a weak view of sin.
- (5) Abelard demonstrates an elitist view of salvation (not for the hardened sinner).<sup>64</sup>

#### **Socinus: Christ as a Noble Martyr**

Faustus Socinus [aka "Socinius" or "Sozzini"] (1539-1604) was an Italian humanist and rationalist who, along with his uncle Lelio (1525-62) became the forerunners of modern Unitarianism. They rejected the deity of Jesus and taught that the soul was annihilated at death for all but a select few who persevered in obeying Christ's commandments.<sup>65</sup>

Since they rejected eternal punishment and believed that Jesus was a mere man, one might expect that the Socinians would have a low view of the Atonement, and that is certainly the case.

In their rationalism the Socinians believed that all of God's attributes were subject to His will. That means that there are no inherent standards of righteousness, for God can simply decide what is good and what is evil. Therefore, God can simply decide not to punish sin, and sin becomes no longer punishable. From this perspective, the concept of propitiation is incomprehensible. God's wrath does not need to be satisfied, for it can be turned on or off as He chooses. As the Racovian Catechism (a Socinian document) states, "the mercy and justice which our adversaries conceive to pertain to God by nature, certainly do not belong to Him." Again, Socinus concludes, "Hence they greatly err who, deceived by the popular use of the word justice, suppose that justice in this sense is a perpetual quality in God, and affirm that it is infinite."<sup>66</sup>

With no justice to satisfy, Christ's death becomes unnecessary and can only be interpreted heretically. As Socinus wrote so plainly, "If we could but get rid of this justice, even if we have no other proof, this fiction of Christ's satisfaction would be thoroughly exposed, and

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<sup>63</sup>Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, in McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 178.

<sup>64</sup>John D. Hannah, Unpublished class notes for 510 ("History of Doctrine"), Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985.

<sup>65</sup>*The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by J. D. Douglas, s.v. "Socinianism," by Robert G. Clouse, 912.

<sup>66</sup>Faustus Socinus, *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, 1.2, in McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 198.

should vanish."<sup>67</sup> Again, the Catechism states, "But did not Christ die also, in order, proper speaking, to purchase our salvation, and literally to pay the debt of our sins? Although Christians at this time commonly so believe, yet this notion is false, erroneous, and exceedingly pernicious."<sup>68</sup>

For the Socinians, Christ is in no sense the mediator between God and mankind. He was a great moral teacher, but His death was only that of a noble martyr providing us with an example of holiness and endurance. As McDonald notes, they see Christ as "an example of man's best rather than the bearer of man's worst."<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately this perspective is particularly common today.<sup>70</sup>

### Grotius: The Governmental Model

Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) was a Dutch lawyer who attempted to moderate some of the theological debates in Europe following the Reformation. He was persecuted for his beliefs, but evidenced a heart for Christian unity and world evangelization.<sup>71</sup>

In his book against Socinus, Grotius defends the doctrine of the Atonement yet agrees with him that God is free to relax His standards. Grotius argues that God is not constrained by His justice, because justice is not an inherent part of the divine nature. He is constrained, however, by His overall responsibility for the orderly government of the universe, which depends on moral law. McDonald compares Grotius's view to that of Socinus:

God is the supreme rector of the world. To punish or to liberate from punishment belongs essentially to this relationship. Not so if God is conceived as a judge. A judge administers the law; he cannot go against it to free the guilty from its punishment or to transfer the guilt to another. The guilty one must himself bear what the law decrees. If God were chiefly lawgiver, then a law attached to a certain crime must be carried out without relaxation. But God is chiefly ruler, whose concern is not the mere self-vindication of the law but the general good. As ruler, then God can either abrogate or alter the law. Socinus had opted for the former alternative and so eliminated from his concept of God any regard for justice. Grotius takes the second alternative. God alters the law; for the commendable reasons of his own glory and man's salvation he toned it down. The principle of the divine ordering is then precisely this: "All positive laws are relaxable." Law still remains; but in relaxing it, God exhibits both its validity as requiring deference and his own deity as supreme ruler. . . .

God spared us, indeed, but in such a way that we cannot think that he held the punishment of sin as a matter of indifference. Forgiveness cannot be so given as to make sin unimportant. Christ, however, did not bear the exact penalty but the substitute for a penalty. The sufferings and death of Christ met the requirements of God's law as God has relaxed it for man's sake.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Faustus Socinus, *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, 3.1, in McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 197.

<sup>68</sup>*The Racovian Catechism*, chapter 8.

<sup>69</sup>McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 197.

<sup>70</sup>For a summary of some examples, see Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 141-43.

<sup>71</sup>*The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, edited by J. D. Douglas, s.v. "Grotius," by Haddon Willmer, 440.

<sup>72</sup>McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 204.

The fact is, of course, that God's justice is an inherent part of His nature (Ex. 34:6-7). By treating divine justice as arbitrary, Grotius's "Governmental" view of the Atonement fails to provide true satisfaction for sin, for its penalty goes unexecuted. As McDonald writes, "How the exhibition of what sin deserves, but does not get, can satisfy justice is hard to comprehend."<sup>73</sup>

### Summary

These are just a few of the historical departures from the biblical doctrine of the Atonement, and some of the more contemporary ones will be surveyed later in the course. However, these have been included here to demonstrate a vital principle. "God's love must be viewed in the light of the atonement, not the atonement in the light of God's love."<sup>74</sup> Many have assumed that God's love means Christ did not have to die. In fact, it was the holy love of God that brought Him to the cross.

This completes our examination of the nature of the atonement, and we conclude with the words of John Stott:

In conclusion, the cross enforces three truths—about ourselves, about God and about Jesus Christ.

First, our sin must be extremely horrible. Nothing reveals the gravity of sin like the cross. For ultimately what sent Christ there was neither the greed of Judas, nor the envy of the priests, nor the vacillating cowardice of Pilate, but our own greed, envy, cowardice and other sins, and Christ's resolve in love and mercy to bear their judgment and so put them away. It is impossible for us to face Christ's cross with integrity and not to feel ashamed of ourselves. Apathy, selfishness and complacency blossom everywhere in the world except at the cross. There these noxious weeds shrivel and die. They are seen for the tatty, poisonous things they are. For if there was no way by which the righteous God could righteously forgive our unrighteousness, except that he should bear it himself in Christ, it must be serious indeed. It is only when we see this that, stripped of our self-righteousness and self-satisfaction, we are ready to put our trust in Jesus Christ as the Saviour we urgently need.

Secondly, God's love must be wonderful beyond comprehension. God could quite justly have abandoned us to our fate. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrongdoing and to perish in our sins. It is what we deserved. But he did not. Because he loved us, he came after us in Christ. He pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross, where he bore our sin, guilt, judgment and death. It takes a hard and stony heart to remain unmoved by love like that. It is more than love. Its proper name is 'grace', which is love to the undeserving.

Thirdly, Christ's salvation must be a free gift. He 'purchased' it for us at the high price of his own life-blood. So what is there left for us to pay? Nothing! Since he claimed that all was now 'finished', there is nothing for us to contribute. Not of course that we now have a licence to sin and can always count on God's forgiveness. On the contrary, the same cross of Christ, which is the ground of a free salvation is also the most powerful incentive to a holy life. But his new life follows. First we have to humble ourselves at the foot of the cross, confess that we have sinned and deserve nothing at his hand but judgment, thank him that he loved us and died for us, and receive from him a full and free

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 349.

forgiveness. Against this self-humbling our ingrained pride rebels. We resent the idea that we cannot earn – or even contribute to – our salvation. So we stumble, as Paul put it, over the stumbling-block of the cross.<sup>75</sup>

## The Extent of the Atonement

### Background of the Debate

We have briefly discussed the meaning of the Atonement, and it is natural that we should make some comment here about its extent, since that is an issue that has been hotly debated. This discussion is part of a larger debate between Calvinists<sup>76</sup>, Arminians<sup>77</sup>, and others, making it something of a "can of worms." We will not be able to resolve all of the peripheral issues that this question raises at this point in the course, but we do hope to introduce some elements of the larger debate while focusing briefly on this particular issue.

Most careful dialogue concerning the extent of the Atonement has taken place fairly recently in the history of the Church. There were different points of view prior to the Reformation, but it was not a major source of contention until later.

Augustine maintained that Christ's death was for the elect only, that He did not die for the sins of those who were not predestined for salvation.<sup>78</sup> This view has come to be known as "limited atonement," "limited redemption," or "particular redemption." This and some of the other hard edges of Augustine's theology were left behind by most theologians, with the exception of Gottschalk, who was persecuted in the ninth century for teaching particular redemption and double predestination (the idea that some persons were predestined for salvation and others were predestined in the same way for condemnation).<sup>79</sup>

Aquinas defended the more commonly accepted concept of "unlimited atonement" – that Christ's death was intended for all mankind. That seemed to make better sense in light of passages like 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God desires all men to be saved, and 2 Peter 3:9, which states that He is not willing that any should perish. There is obviously some tension

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<sup>75</sup>Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 83-84.

<sup>76</sup>As I use it here, "Calvinist" describes a believer in Reformed orthodoxy, typified by acceptance of the Articles of the Synod of Dort more than adherence to the teachings of John Calvin. Calvinists may be found in a variety of denominations, but they are most often members of Reformed or Presbyterian congregations.

<sup>77</sup>This is the first reference we have made to "Arminians," and it refers to those who disagree with the Calvinists on matters of divine election and human ability. Arminians must be distinguished from "Armenians," a race of people from Armenia (trust me – this is a common mistake). Arminians derive their name from Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), and their historical teachings are found in the Remonstrance of 1610. They are found in a very wide variety of denominations, but are most prominent in the Methodist Church. The theological differences between Calvinists and Arminians may be summarized by the acronym TULIP. Most Calvinists accept these five points, while Arminians reject them: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. As we will see throughout the rest of the course, mediating positions are also quite possible.

<sup>78</sup>Jonathan H. Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross*, 11-19; W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 133.

<sup>79</sup>Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross*, 23-32.

between these passages and those that speak of unconditional election (e.g. Rom. 8:29-30; 9-11; Eph. 1:4-5), and Aquinas resolved this tension by distinguishing between God's "antecedent" will and His "consequent" will. The first is universal and conditional – it is God's desire that all would be saved if they would believe. The second is simple, with no conditions – it is God's predestination of the elect. For Thomas, Christ's death was an expression of God's antecedent will, so it was *sufficient* for all mankind. However, it is applied through His consequent will, so it is *efficient* only for the elect.<sup>80</sup>

Aquinas was sometimes given to the pursuit of theological "rabbit trails," devoting considerable effort to issues that were not emphasized in the biblical text. That could not be said of Calvin, however, who resisted the kind of speculation that characterized so many of his predecessors. Calvin wrote,

Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. No restraints can hold it back from wandering in forbidden bypaths and thrusting upward to the heights. If allowed, it will leave no secret to God that it will not search out and unravel. Since we see so many on all sides rushing into this audacity and impudence, among them certain men not otherwise bad, they should in due season be reminded of the measure of their duty in this regard.

First, then, let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. For it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself, and to unfold from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom, which he would have us revere but not understand that through this also he should fill us with wonder. He has set forth by his Word the secrets of his will that he has decided to reveal in so far as he foresaw that they would concern and benefit us.<sup>81</sup>

This conscious resistance of extrabiblical speculation may be what has kept the great Reformer's thoughts on the specific extent of the Atonement somewhat unclear. Some scholars have maintained that Calvin believed in unlimited atonement,<sup>82</sup> while others have argued precisely the opposite.<sup>83</sup>

Peterson suggests that open debate concerning the extent of the Atonement did not really take place until after Calvin's lifetime. He writes,

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<sup>80</sup>These ideas are not original with Aquinas, but he certainly systematized and popularized them. See Rainbow, 34-38.

<sup>81</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, 21:1.

<sup>82</sup>R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: University Press, 1979); Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 – An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Curt D. Daniel, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1983), 777-828; Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

<sup>83</sup>Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross*; Roger Nicole, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 197-225.



Frequently overlooked and yet most important is the fact that the extent of the atonement was not an issue in Calvin's time. The debate over limited or unlimited atonement belongs to the period of Reformed orthodoxy. Hence the question of Calvin's view of the extent of the atonement is anachronistic. It is unfair to ask for a man's position on a matter that became an issue only after his death. Yet scholars persist in asking the question. What conclusion can be reached as to Calvin's thought on the extent of the atonement as that doctrine was later taught? It is clear that Calvin denied universalism, the teaching that all would ultimately be saved. It is equally plain that Calvin held to a universal and free offer of the gospel. There is too little evidence in the *Institutes* to reach a conclusion on the extent of the atonement.<sup>84</sup>

It may not have been a major issue in Calvin's day, but the idea of "limited atonement" has been the source of considerable discussion ever since it was clearly articulated among his followers, and that may mean that theologians are attempting to answer an unanswerable question. One type of argument in which they have probably gone too far in their speculation is in the attempt to determine the order of God's decrees concerning creation and salvation. The major views are provided in a chart at the end of this section of notes and they are discussed in most conservative systematic theologies.<sup>85</sup> However, more appropriate arguments have been suggested for both sides, to which we will now turn.

### The Best Arguments for Particular Redemption

#### 1. God's Intention

Arthur W. Pink quite clearly states one of the most common arguments for particular redemption, that Christ's mission was concerned only with the elect.

What was the purpose of the Eternal Three in sending Christ Jesus into the world? What was the incarnation of the Son of God intended to accomplish? What were His sufferings and obedience ordained to effect? . . .

God had both a subservient and a supreme design in sending Christ into this world: the supreme design was to display His own glory, the subservient design was to save His elect unto His own glory. . . .

The story of the vast majority is that Christ came here to make salvation *possible* for sinners: He has done His part, now they must do theirs. To reduce the wondrous, finished, and glorious work of Christ to a merely making salvation possible is most dishonoring and insulting to Him.

Christ came here to carry into effect God's sovereign purpose of election, to save a people already 'His' (Matt. 1:21) by covenant settlement. They are a people whom God hath 'from the beginning chosen unto salvation' (2 Thess. 2:13), and redemption was in order to the *accomplishing* of that decree. And if we believe what Scripture declares concerning

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<sup>84</sup>Peterson, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement*, 90. Peterson has slightly revised his position by saying that the extent of the atonement was discussed prior to Calvin, but it was not an issue *in reformed circles* until after his death (*Calvin and the Atonement*, 119).

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 118-25; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 826ff.; Henry C. Thiessen, *Introductory Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 343f.; and L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 9 of the portion on soteriology (vol. 3 in the original edition).

the person of Christ, then we have indubitable proof that there can be no possible failure in connection with *His* mission.<sup>86</sup>

## 2. The Efficacy of the Cross

Pink writes,

Two widely differing views have been taken concerning the effectuation of what the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus was meant to achieve. Some have affirmed that the Atonement possesses only a *conditional* efficacy, others that it is vested with an *infallible* efficacy. These two views are known as the Arminian and the Calvinistic interpretations. They are completely antagonistic and utterly irreconcilable. The difference between them is that of Truth and error, Light and darkness, Jehovah and Baal, God and the Devil.<sup>87</sup>

Lest there be any doubt as to which he prefers, Pink favors the Calvinist interpretation! He does so because he emphasizes that the cross actually accomplishes salvation for the elect. It does not merely make it possible. This is because the death of Christ is applied to all for whom He died. Pink writes further, "The law of substitution, which is a principle appointed by the Divine government, requires the salvation of all those whom Christ represented."<sup>88</sup> If Christ was punished for someone's sins, how could the same penalty be executed again?<sup>89</sup> How could someone for whom Christ died be lost? This argument is based on texts like Hebrews 9:12; 10:14, which suggest that Christ's death actually secured atonement for sins.

John Owen articulates a similar argument:

So that when it is said in the Scripture, Christ hath reconciled us to God, redeemed us, saved us by His blood, underwent the punishment of our sins, and so made satisfaction for us, they assert that no more is meant but that Christ did that which upon the fulfilling of the condition that is of us required, these things will follow. To the death of Christ, indeed, they assign many glorious things; but what they give on the one hand they take away with the other, by suspending the enjoyment of them on a condition by us to be fulfilled, not by him procured; and in terms assert that the proper and full end of the death of Christ was the doing of that whereby God, his justice being satisfied, might save sinners if he would, and on what condition it pleased him,--that a door of grace might be opened to all that would come in, and not that actual justification and remission of sins, life, and immortality were procured by him, but only a possibility of those things, that so it might be.<sup>90</sup>

In other words, Christ's death *actually* accomplishes our salvation. It does not simply enable God to offer salvation on some other condition.

## 3. The Sufficiency of Christ's Death

Those who believe in particular redemption maintain that the death of Christ was sufficient to save any number of worlds, but that it was intended to save only the elect. Hence the

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<sup>86</sup>Arthur W. Pink, *The Satisfaction of Christ*, 107, 110, 113.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>90</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death*, II. IV.

language of the Synod of Dort: "This death of the Son of God is a single and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, of infinite value and price, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world."<sup>91</sup> *Neither side doubts that Christ's death was sufficient for all. Neither side doubts that it is efficient only for some. The debate centers on God's intention and the efficacy of the cross.*

#### 4. The Limited Focus of Christ's Intercession

It has been argued that Jesus' prayer in John 17 was offered on behalf of the elect only (vv. 6-9), and that this demonstrated His intention in going to the cross on their behalf. As John Owen wrote, "Christ offered not for them for whom he is no priest, and he is a priest only for them for whom he doth intercede."<sup>92</sup>

#### 5. Other Passages

Other passages that have been used to argue for limited atonement include: John 6:37-40, 44, 64-65; 10:14-15, 26-28; 15:13. Matt. 20:28; 26:27-28.

### **The Best Arguments for Unlimited Atonement**

#### 1. Bible Passages

From a non-Calvinist perspective, the best arguments for unlimited atonement are not logical, but biblical. Of the biblical proof-texts, the most commonly cited are 1 John 2:2; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19; John 3:16-20; and 2 Peter 2:1. Others might include John 12:32-33 and 1 Timothy 2:3-6.

Particular redemptionists often interpret "all" and "world" in these passages as referring to "all kinds of people," and that is not utterly without basis. "All" cannot mean "all" throughout Romans 5, for example, without teaching some form of universal salvation. They might also say that passages like 1 John 2:2 (which says Jesus is the "propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for those of the whole world") simply acknowledge that there is no other propitiation for sins – Jesus is the Savior for us, and for anyone else who would be saved.

#### 2. The Universal Offer of the Gospel

Both sides in this debate affirm the necessity of preaching the gospel universally in light of frequent biblical commands to that effect (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; etc.). In fact, some of history's greatest evangelists, like Charles Spurgeon, believed in limited atonement, and John Owen regarded the preaching of the gospel as a universal benefit of the death of Christ. In the eyes of many, however, the universal offer of the gospel seems to make more sense if Christ is thought to have died for the sins of every individual. The provision has been made, but the terms must be accepted.

Particular redemptionists are fond of asking who God intended to save through the death of Christ (see above). However, by viewing the question from a divine perspective only, they may fail to provide necessary balance. After the language of John 3:16, we might say that God's intention in giving His Son was that *all who believe* might have eternal life.

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<sup>91</sup>Articles of the Synod of Dort, 2.3.

<sup>92</sup>John Owen, *The Death of Death*, I:VIII.

Each member of the Trinity exercises both general and particular ministries with regard to salvation. The Father loves the world, but chooses the elect. The Son dies for the world, but ultimately redeems only the elect. And, as will be argued later in the course, the Spirit reproves the world, but enlightens and calls only the elect.

Grudem's comment is helpful on this issue:

At this point some Reformed theologians will object and will warn us that if we say to unbelievers, "Christ died for your sins," the unbelievers will draw the conclusion, "Therefore I am saved no matter what I do." But this does not seem to be a problem in actual fact, for whenever evangelicals (Reformed or non-Reformed) speak about the gospel to unbelievers, they are always very clear on the fact that the death of Christ has no benefit for a person unless that person believes in Christ. Therefore, the problem seems to be more something that Reformed people *think* unbelievers should believe (if they were consistent in reasoning back into the secret counsels of God and the relationship between the Father and Son in the counsels of the Trinity at the point of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice on the cross). But unbelievers simply do not reason that way: they know that they must exercise faith in Christ before they will experience any benefits from his saving work. Moreover, it is far more likely that people will understand the sentence "Christ died for your sins" in the doctrinally correct sense that "Christ died in order to offer you forgiveness for your sins" rather than in the doctrinally incorrect sense, "Christ died and completely paid the penalty already for all your sins."<sup>93</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

There are several essentials with which all parties agree:

1. Christ's death was of inestimable value and was not "limited" in its worth.<sup>94</sup>
2. The gospel is to be preached to all persons. We do not try to establish a person's identity as one of the elect before presenting the gospel.<sup>95</sup>
3. Not all persons come to faith in Christ. The Atonement is thus limited in its effect, though not by the insufficiency of the sacrifice.<sup>96</sup>
4. Both sides in this debate will affirm 1 Timothy 4:10, which states that God is "the Savior of all persons, especially of believers." In some sense it is appropriate to say that He is the Savior of all (potentially?) but is in particular the Savior of believers (actually).

### Conclusion to the Lesson

This lesson can best be summarized by the words of John 3:16. "For God so loved the world [foundation] that He gave His only begotten Son [substitutionary death upon the cross], that whoever believes in Him [unlimited atonement] should not perish, but have eternal life."

*When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

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<sup>93</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 602. I should note that Grudem believes in particular redemption.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. the Articles of the Synod of Dort, 2.3.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 2.5.

<sup>96</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 2.6.

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most –  
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were a present far too small:  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all. (Watts)*

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*"If we reposition the cross and the blood of Christ for an age of ecological challenges and depth psychology, and if we interpret these images in terms of the costliness and interconnectedness of life, then perhaps we can tap into the richness of Christian tradition within the church and speak meaningfully to the cross's cultured despisers."*

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