

others die martyrs

Others die Martyrs, but Christ was born a Martyr. (John Donne, Sermons VII, 11, 1–8, cited in Moses, J. One Equall Light: An Anthology of the Writings of John Donne. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003.)

REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES

The key idea we explored last time was that there are, first, many different ways of thinking about the atonement and what it accomplishes, and second, the dominant model of atonement you hold governs the way you repent, the way your worship, and the way you think about God and his work. This is why it is imperative to have—not necessarily a complete and correct model—but first a living connexion to Jesus Christ through the experience of his atonement, and second an understanding of the inadequacy of the models themselves. We discussed metaphors for atonement, and we'll come back to those at the end of this second lecture.

Although many variations on their themes can be identified, most models of atonement fall broadly into one of three categories. We'll step in and out of this framework as we proceed, but will keep it always in view.

MORAL

The most basic, if not the historically most popular, theory is that what Jesus suffered has efficacy by its influence on the human heart: that by the contemplation and imitation of Jesus' actions, including his comportment during his passion and death, we are at-oned with God the Father.

Christ takes away sins because by heavenly and most ample promises He attracts and is strong to move all men to penitence, whereby sins are destroyed. ... He takes away sins because by the example of His most innocent life, He very readily draws all, who have not lost hope, to leave their sins and zealously to embrace righteousness and holiness.
(Socinus, Prælectiones Theologicæ, p. 591)

In other words, the meaning of Christ's death was to demonstrate God's love towards His children and thus to soften our hearts, causing us to repent.

TRANSACTIONAL/RANSOM

This theory was based on the slave economy of antiquity, in which if a man or woman was captured or killed a price was set for the redemption (either of the hostage or of the killer):

“The devil ... is found in possession of man, and his rights as possessor cannot be ignored, however he came by them. Therefore God consents to pay a price, the death of His Own Son, for the release of man. But in accepting this price the devil is deceived. He [both] loses his power over man, and he is not competent to hold in his power the holy Son of God”
(Grenstead, p. 35).

Of course, if God is omnipotent and righteous, why does he need to parlay with the devil at all to achieve his ends?

SUBSTITUTIONARY

Jesus Christ is punished instead of us. Only divine forgiveness can satisfy divine justice. (God is not willing to pardon a sin without satisfaction.)

This last is the primary occasion of tonight's discourse.

As Christians, we accept the premise that Jesus came to save us from sin—else why did he come at all? The gospel record is clear and unambiguous on this point. And the horrible burden he bore to render us capable of joint-heirship with him in the kingdom of God surely would not have been borne if there were any other way. This is the naked fact which we must engage, whether mystically or theologically.

We started from the earliest and most straightforward models of atonement: in particular, the ransom and moral models of atonement, and then the medieval devotion to the passion. Today we will dive into a more familiar and more formal model of atonement, the *substitutionary* model.

However, before turning to that please entertain a brief digression into the roots of the word “atonement” and the words it translates from Greek and Hebrew.

ETYMOLOGY

יום הכּפּוּרִים *yom ha-kippurim* as *dies expiationum*

at-onement (Tyndale 1534), literally “at onement”, a mutual “at oneness” or “unification”, “one-ing”.

καταλλαγή *katallagē*—v. to exchange money, to reconcile enmity to friendship, to return to the *status quo ante* (Strong’s 2643) Romans 5:11

ἱλάσκομαι *hilaskomai*—v. to be merciful, to make propitiation for (Strong’s 2433) Hebrews 2:17

λυτρωσις *lutrōsis*—n. payment of ransom-price to free a slave (Strong’s 3085) Luke 1:68

כָּפַר *kaphar* v. cover over, pacify, make propitiation (Strong's)

<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm> In particular, as we discussed in the section on Hebrew thought, to repair as if something had never been broken.

Elsewhere we read of the “mercy seat”, the ἱλαστήριον *hilasterion* or *zakah* – site of propitiation – mercy seat

SATISFACTION (MEDIÆVAL)

[comic]

Perhaps the most popular Protestant model of atonement, the satisfaction theory and its primary derivative, penal substitution, jointly posit that the Atonement was a substitutionary sacrifice which satisfied the demands of God's justice upon the sinner. (It is worth mentioning again at this point that just because similar language is used in the scriptures, that doesn't mean that a particular model is *right* or *wrong*—the language was subsequently coöpted by theologians. Thus when Alma the Younger speaks of his experiences, he's not invoking a theory written later but describing his personal experience which may or may not map to this understanding.)

One of the most influential theologians who lived, at a time of great ferment, was St Anselm

[Anselm] dismis[s]e[d] at once, as unthinkable, all attempts to regard the devil as being in any sense the possessor of rights. And the mere conception of God as just does not cover the facts of the case. Where is the justice of releasing the guilty and of punishing the innocent, however willing the latter may be to suffer? (Grensted, p. 121).

The notion of *penal substitution*, the challenging notion that an innocent person *could* stand in the stead of the guilty, was here first clearly articulated and theologically explored for the first time.

Earlier Christian thinkers had developed a doctrine of *merit* and *penance* in analogy with Roman civil law. Tertullian and Cyprian were very concerned about proper penance:

How absurd it is, to leave the penance unperformed, and yet expect forgiveness of sins! What is it but to fail to pay the price, and to stretch out the hand for the benefit? The Lord has ordained that forgiveness is to be granted for this price: He wills that the remission of the penalty is to be purchased for the payment which penance makes. (Tertullian, De Poenitentia, 6).

Essentially, the doctrine of *penance* was a form of satisfaction, the performance of a temporal penalty itself acceptable to God to avoid eternal damnation. Anselm built upon this foundation for his proposal of why Jesus had to suffer and die.

In a nutshell, Anselm took feudal society as the normative model of the universe. For a feudal overlord, public justice is not predicated on an abstract ideal of justice, but on the expressed esteem and security of his person. Thus Anselm proposed the following:

God is king over the universe. When his subjects sin, it is an offense to God. When the king is offended, the king's honor can either be restored formally or the offender must be punished. Jesus is then a knight whose actions restore honor without punishment on our part, if we will let him be our champion.

Jesus Christ suffers for us, or rather on our behalf, rather like a knight in a tournament defends the honor of a lady slighted. Yet even though our world has changed dramatically, it is still a linear evolution of this idea which impacts how most contemporary Christians and Mormons think of the atonement.

A closely related doctrine is that of *merit*. When you have a system of penance—that earthly deeds have eternal cachet—it becomes straightforward to extrapolate a system of merit—that fulfillment of the law beyond strict obligation gives one an edge. (There are also echoes of the justification/sanctification distinction, or the redemption and quickening which Mormonism can make much of.)

This model eventually gets the Roman Catholic church into trouble, as a particular doctrine not original to but greatly elaborated by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas is an interesting fellow—“dumb ox” to bellow, spent life on great theological system, then days before his death had an audience with Jesus and decided as a result that all of this work was as straw; accepting this and ceasing his labors, he soon passed away. Aquinas held that the atonement solves two problems: first, Jesus’ passion and death serve to make satisfaction and thus solve the problem of past sin; second, as Christ thus merits grace, his passion and death then serve to solve the problem of future sin. This is elaborated by Aquinas and his successors into the doctrine of *supererogation*, or superabundance of grace. Later on this turned into the Catholic concept of the Treasury of Merit. The line following this in the dictionary of philosophy I consulted reports only, in a fit of terse humor, “see Indulgence”¹.

¹ *Chamber’s Encyclopedia*, 1896. Supererogation. Cf. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011. Supererogation.

PENAL SUBSTITUTION

When Martin Luther rejected, among many other facets of Roman Catholic spirituality, the doctrine of penance, he introduced a ransom-like theory which in many respects reminds us of the Christus Victor model. His followers and successors—Calvin, Melanchthon—combined this with Anselm’s satisfaction and elaborated it into a theory often called “penal substitution”. It follows the satisfaction theory in many regards but diverges from them particularly in its account of God’s requirements on our part. Namely, the idea of penance was rejected, and the corresponding superabundance of grace. (Without penance, the theoretical basis of this theory becomes problematic.) A legal concept was imposed instead of a feudal one.

PENAL/LIMITED (REFORMATION)

The concise statement of the penal substitution or limited atonement model:

Jesus Christ is punished instead of us. Only divine forgiveness can satisfy divine justice (God is not willing to pardon a sin without satisfaction).

This (and the satisfaction theory) both build on the following scriptures:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ·even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ·for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ·being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: ·whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; ·to declare, I say,

at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:21–26)

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. ·But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. ·And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. ·Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. (Gal. 3:10–13)

Penal substitution positions the atonement in more legal terms, particularly as John Calvin was a lawyer: man is guilty and under the judgment of God as if in a court; the only punishment is death. Jesus as Son of God was permitted the incarnation in order to bear the death and unending weight of our sins placed upon him. (This probably sounds like a pretty comfortable way to read the atonement for many of you. It's certainly well-grounded in scriptural language.) "[Jesus] made a substitute and a surety in the place of transgressors and even submitted as a criminal, to sustain and suffer all the punishment which would have been inflicted on them" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:16§10).

It differs from the satisfaction theory particularly in its account of the rôle of law and the highly legalistic and political conception brought to the atonement. "Justice demands the punishment of sin. Therefore the attitude of a just God towards the sinner can only be one of wrath. But if the punishment is endured to the uttermost by One who adequately represents the sinner, justice is satisfied and God's mercy towards the sinner can have free play" (Grensted, pp. 204–5).

Martin Luther wrote,

When the merciful Father saw that we were oppressed by the law, and were held under the curse, and that nothing could free us from it, He sent His Son into the world, and cast upon Him all the sins of all men, and said to Him: Be Thou Peter that denier, Paul that persecutor, blasphemer, and violent, David that adulterer, that sinner who ate the apple in Paradise, that robber upon the cross, in a word be Thou the person of all men, who hast wrought the sins of all men; consider Thou therefore how Thou mayest pay and mayest make satisfaction for them. Then cometh the law and saith : I find that sinner taking upon Him the sin of all men and I see no sin beside, save in Him, therefore let Him die upon the Cross. And so it attacks Him and slays Him.

This being done the whole world is purged of all sin and expiation made; therefore also is it free from death and from all ills. (Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians)

Jonathan Edwards, of “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” fame, was a very powerful and original theologian. He expresses the limited penal substitution model thus:

For if the Son of God be substituted in the sinner’s room, then his sin must be charged upon him. He will thereby take the guilt of the sinner upon himself. He must be subject to the same law that man was, both as to the commands, and threatenings. ...

The justice of God is exceedingly glorified in this work. God is so strictly and immutably just, that He would not spare His beloved Son when He took upon Him the guilt of men’s sins, and was substituted in the room

of sinners. He would not abate Him the least mite of that debt which justice demanded. Never did God so manifest His hatred of sin as in the death and sufferings of His only begotten Son. Hereby He showed Himself unappeasable to sin, and that it was impossible for Him to be at peace with it. ... And lastly, God has exceedingly glorified His mercy and love in this work. . . . now God hath shown that He can find it in His heart to love sinners, who deserve His infinite hatred. (Jonathan Edwards, The Wisdom of God Displayed in the Way of Salvation)

One commentator expresses it thus: for the Protestant theologians, “retributive justice stands out as the primary attribute of God” (Mörlin cited in Aulén, p. 117). The love of God is seen as in conflict, a dramatic paradox, with the wrath of God; and yet both are satisfied.

In one way or another, more ink has been spilled analyzing the penal substitution theory than any other. From Martin Luther, Philipp Melanchthon, and John Calvin to Jonathan Edwards, Karl Barth, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, among dozens of other major theologians, this is THE theory of atonement. It’s only major competitor for most Protestants today (particularly evangelicals) is Arminianism, or unlimited penal atonement.

ARMINIANISM/UNLIMITED

One major distinction between the limited and unlimited forms of penal substitution hinges not on the mechanism of Christ’s work but rather its scope: to Jacobus Arminius and his theological descendants, Christ’s atonement and the resulting call to repent and be saved is made to all men, regardless of “election”.

Stated differently, most Reformed theologians held that justification followed faith in Jesus Christ; others held that justification took place once for all on the cross and that this decree of atonement remains suspended until activated by our

repentance². (This is not unique to Arminianism but is characteristic of it.)

Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer. ... Man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good. (Articles of Remonstrance, ii–iii).

Arminianism is probably the closest of any model to the practical lived theology of Mormonism today, particularly as restorationists like Alexander Campbell drew from its well. John Wesley and Methodism also picked up the unlimited penal substitution model as normative. But in practice, it was soon dominated by the governmental theory proposed by Hugo Grotius

GOVERNMENTAL/RECTORAL

Grotius was an extremely accomplished Dutch jurist who in his spare time was interested in the problem of Jesus' death and its relationship to God the Father's just rule over the cosmos. He elaborated his understanding of Arminius into another culturally-situated model of atonement, this time based on models of economy and politics.

2 P. Wilenski, V. Christensen. "Imputed Righteousness and the Forensic Gospel".

God, being moved by His own goodness to do us signal benefit, but met by the obstacle of sins which deserved punishment, determined that Christ, being willing of His own love towards men, should by bearing the severest tortures and a bloody and ignominious death pay the penalty for our sins, so that without injury to the display of the Divine justice we might be liberated, upon the intervention of a true faith, from the penalty of eternal death. (De Fid. Cath., 1).

Grotius argued that Jesus did not suffer the exact equivalent of our sins, the punishment due to sinners. Instead, he suffered a profound but representative pain which demonstrated how loathsome sin is to God and allowing God to pass over our sins, having dramatically illustrated their severity.

Punishment to Grotius is the special prerogative of the State, and God as the head of state is permitted the expression of punishment as he deems necessary: “all punishment has as its purpose the common good; viz. the preservation of order and the giving of an example” (*ibid.*, 2). In addition, the atonement applies to the corporate church rather than to individuals, who participate via baptism in the collective atonement offered the universal Christian church.

So, taken together, we’ve covered four branches of the substitution theory tree: satisfaction, limited penal substitution, unlimited penal substitution, and the governmental theory.

- What do we like in the family of substitutionary theories?

I think that these theories correctly reemphasize the danger and severity of sin, particularly as against the ransom theory and moral theories where sin is almost subjugated to death.

- So what’s wrong with these models?

The root problem with all of these models is articulated by one scholar as extortion³. While Jesus Christ is definitely on our side, God the Father comes off as a complete monster: in token of his arbitrary offense (which could just be forgiven), he demands payment and ultimately the leverage of his son to pay the debt. It's morally horrible. This has probably been the chief criticism of this model, and it is particularly challenging for the concept of a purely omnipotent God. It also leads to a "divine command" theory of ethics, which we can discuss some other time.

(A counter-argument can be made that this somehow misrepresents penal substitution, that we can have both satisfaction and a warm and loving God. Myself, I have a hard time buying it. Nevertheless, we are concerned here with the effects on worshippers of the models of atonement, and this family of theories in particular is utterly pervasive and easy to construe dangerously.)

These are primarily economic and corporate models, and thus built on Mammon. I believe that any economic model of atonement is ultimately deeply problematic. That's an understatement. I became quite upset and angry when I prepared this section, because of how deeply repugnant this view of salvation and atonement is to me. I think it's a slander on God and Jesus and founded in a false and damaging concept of divinity.

Another problem common to the Protestant formulations in particular is the utter depravity of mankind, that we are capable of no good of ourselves but only as God works through us. While Mormons don't believe that we are saved *by* our works, or at least not exclusively, we certainly don't buy the line that humans are capable of no good and we should be wary of theories of atonement that are built upon the proposition.

3 D. Smith, "My Translation of Packer's Debt-as-Atonement Parable".

DISCUSSION ON METAPHORS

Ultimately, one of the possible morals of our discussion is that we shouldn't limit ourselves to one model or theory of speaking about Jesus' redemptive work⁴. We don't now, although we largely rely on penal substitution; but now you have the framework to see how and why you can use a given model to express some truth about Christ that your sight penetrates to.

With that, let's circle back around to the exercise we started with: the metaphors of atonement. How do these fit into the major models here?

CONCLUSION

Many questions still remain, answered more or less or not at all by this melting pot of theory:

- How does a model of atonement impact theology? Can you find specific examples of this impact in Mormonism that are currently in use today? Can you think of some others that are implied but have not yet been explored?
- One question that arises (and was briefly discussed last time): are we saved from *sin* or saved from *our sins*?
- Another issue that these theories have yet inadequately responded to is christological: why did God the Father *need* God the Son? Classical trinitarian thought has contorted itself every which way to thread this needle, but I think particularly that the atonement must be part of whatever answer is given.

My final thought prior to our discussion activity is on one point where all of these models fail. I'll expand on this indirectly in the final lecture, but it is critical to seeing beyond these images—these idols—which have dominated formal theological discussion for a millennium.

⁴R. Grow (2013). "Accessible: Thesis Fourteen. The atonement is multifaceted and must not be reduced to one culturally conditioned atonement theory but, rather, to a theologically unified but multi-faceted model".

Christ had a mortal experience where he was initially as helpless as a baby, and was at the end as helpless as a lamb trussed for killing. That experience at first seems like a far cry from the might and power of the Everlasting Father. But it isn't. The experience of helplessness is one of the fundamental things. It is divine. (G., Junior Ganymede)

We worship and are at-oned by Jesus Christ, who is a Lion in conflict and a Lamb in triumph.

DISCUSSION ON PARABLES

To close out our discussion tonight, I want us to take a few parables and try to understand them as discussions of atonement. I do not want to shoehorn the atonement into any one of these parables completely, although at least two of them come very very close.

- The good shepherd (John 10:1–18, 25–30): price of return already paid
- The good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)
- The lost coin (Luke 15:8–10); the merchant & pearl (Matt. 13:45–46); the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31–2)
- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32): how does Christ represent each person?
- The sower & the soils (Matt. 13:3–9); the steward (Luke 12:35–48); the treasure (Matt. 13:44)

This ultimately contributes what I may call the “narrative” theory of atonement in the final lecture.

QUESTIONS FOR NEXT TIME

- Which models are dominant in the church discourse today? Do certain leaders favor specific models?
- How do ordinances allow us to participate in the atonement? What additional facets of atonement does Mormon revealed religion show or imply?
- How has your understanding of the atonement and its rôle in your life changed over the years? Are there specific experiences and insights you would like to share?

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EXPIATIVE

Other theories being propitiative, or denoting the appeasement of the wrath of God against the sinner, an expiation signifies the cleansing of sin from the sinner and his or her deliverance. (This is perhaps more a gap between emphases than a truly different model, which is why I postponed it to a separate discussion close to the end.)

<http://orthodox-apologetics.blogspot.com/2010/08/expiation-vs-propitiation.html>