Atonement Paper

Assignment 7-1 for ST5534 Systematic Theology 1

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Atonement has to be one of the most important issues we have discussed thus far in this course. I am beyond excited to be able to discuss this topic because it is what our salvation is made of. Without the atoning work of Christ we would not be able to stand before God justified and very little stands in comparison to this topic. I have heard the topics of justification and sanctification talked about in many ways but one of my favorites is from John MacArthur where he describes justification as a bath that cleans the whole body and sanctification as feet cleansing. We as Christians are made right with God instantly through justification and are not in need of a full bath again as MacArthur puts it but we still deal with sin, which causes our feet to become dirty so we should be asking forgiveness from our sin each day to can clean our feet. I was having trouble finding the previous statement but I remember the idea behind it and it really brings this issue to light for me.

Erickson states the importance of atonement right from the start when he says, “In the doctrine of the atonement we see perhaps the clearest indication of the organic character of theology; that is, we see that the various doctrines fit together in a cohesive fashion.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Within the first chapter on atonement Erickson brings up 5 different historical views on this topic each having an aspect to atonement but not painting a full picture for us. The 5 views that Erickson covers are “In his death Christ (1) gave us a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of us, (2) demonstrated the great extent of God’s love, (3) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God’s righteousness, (4) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power, and (5) rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. We humans needed all of these things done for us, and Christ did them all.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Within these 5 different areas of focus we see that each plays a role in the bigger picture of atonement but Erickson says that there is another one that makes the others possible. This one view that “bears force to the others” is the penal substitution theory. This theory makes all the others possible and where I would say that I place my view on this topic.

The issue of atonement and the spiritual life of Christians is significant because it shapes our faith at its core. Erickson brings up the importance for this issue by saying, “The substitutionary theory of the atoning death of Christ, when grasped in all its complexity, is a rich and meaningful truth. It carries several major implications for our understanding of salvation.” We see in the previous statement that there is several implications for believers including the total depravity of all humans, God’s nature not being one-sided nor is there any tension between its different aspects, there is no other way of salvation but by grace and specifically the death of Christ, there is security for the believer in his or her relationship to God and we must never take lightly the salvation we have. Erickson does a great job at laying out those 5 implications that impact ones spiritual life drastically and they help the body of Christ have a firm grasp on what Jesus did for us on the cross. These help the church give a clear foundation to stand on when preforming the tasks of reaching others, training them and sending them out in Christ.

1. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Christian Theology 3rd Edition, Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)