

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 15: The Work of Christ

Last time: *Christ is fully God and fully man; one person with two natures. His unique identity is essential for his act of salvation. Jesus fills the three offices of prophet, priest, and king.*

Work of Christ: Active and Passive Obedience

1. Active Obedience

"If Christ had only earned forgiveness of sins for us, then we would not merit heaven. Our guilt would have been removed, but we would simply be in the position of Adam and Eve before they had done anything good or bad and before they had passed a time of probation successfully. To be established in righteousness forever and to have their fellowship with God made sure forever, Adam and Eve had to obey God perfectly over a period of time. Then God would have looked on their faithful obedience with pleasure and delight, and they would have lived with him in fellowship forever." Wayne Grudem

Christ lived a perfect life, sinlessly obeying the Law of God (Gal 4:4).

- Hebrews 5:8–9 "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. [9] And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,"
- Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."
- 1 Cor. 1:30 Paul says that Christ has been made "our righteousness"
- Romans 5:19 "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous"

2. Passive Obedience: Why did Christ die?

Atonement theories (What is done?)

1. Ransom (classical)-formulated by Origen-regarded the atonement as a ransom paid to Satan. Origen taught that Christ was a trap: his humanity was the necessary bait for luring Satan into thinking that he had at last won out over God, and then he conquered the devil by his deity.

Critiques: Gregory of Nanzianzus questioned God using deception. More troubling was the idea that Satan was the rightful owner of human beings to which a ransom should be paid.

Satan's role in the drama is that of a seducer and prosecutor rather than judge or claimant in the dispute.

2. Christus Victor-a more general way of speaking about Christ's death as a conquest over Satan. Christ's kingdom overturning the kingdoms of this world, the defeat of Satan and the powers of this age.

The danger of contemporary theories of Christus Victor that push out the propitiatory character of Christ's death. Horton writes, "Christ's death was a victory over the powers only because in it he

bears away the guilt for sin, 'canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands...nailing it to the cross.'" Col. 2:13-15.

3. Satisfaction-Anselm of Canterbury emphasized Christ's death as the satisfaction paid to God's offended dignity. Like a monarch slighted by a subject, God must have a suitable tribute to outweigh the affront to his honor. However, God's majesty is infinite and therefore sin demands an infinite penalty...only God can pay.

Good: it points out that the problem is God's problem with sin. God has been offended.

Bad: it is not God's dignity that needs satisfaction; it is God's justice. It also makes it a transaction between God and Jesus without any treatment of its communication to sinners.

4. Moral influence-Abelard-the purpose of Christ's death was to provide a moving example of God's love for sinners that would provoke repentance.

5. Penal Substitution-Only humans can rightfully repay the debt to God's justice which was incurred through their willful disobedience to God. Since only God can make the satisfaction necessary to repay it, therefore we stand in need of a Mediator who can both represent Man and God. Christ is a sacrifice on behalf of humanity, taking humanity's debt for sin upon himself, and propitiating God's wrath (Isa 53:4-11; Rom 3:23-26; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:10-13; 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18; 1 John 2:2, 4:10).

While Penal Substitution is at the center of the atonement, we've seen how other theories (though flawed) can have true elements in them. When, however, they fail to include Penal Substitution, they fall short of biblical atonement.

The Extent of Christ's Atonement

Old Testament

If Atonement for sin was necessary and done by Christ as the only mediator, then how were believers in the OT saved?

WCF 8.6. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world; being yesterday and today the same, and forever.

For All or For Some

Definite atonement (How is it done?)

WCF 8.8. To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by his Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by his almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to his wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.

What is the extent of the atonement? Is it effective to save or does it just make salvation possible?

Thesis	Extent and Nature	Position
Christ saved every person	Unlimited in extent and effect	Universal salvation
Christ made possible the salvation of every person	Unlimited in extent, but limited in effect	Hypothetical universalism
Christ saved all the elect	Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect	Definite atonement

Summary: Christ died for (1) all the sins of all people, (2) some of the sins of all people, or (3) all of the sins of some people. If unbelief is a sin, and some people are finally condemned, then there is at least one sin for which Christ did not make adequate satisfaction.¹

Is Christianity exclusive or universal?

Exclusive: There is only one way to God: Christ the One Mediator.

Universal: Christ is the mediator for all humans.

Newbigin:

What I am pleading for is simple, but not, I hope, simplistic. It is simply for a recovery of confidence in the gospel, the truth, sufficiency, finality and universality of that which God has done for the whole human race in Jesus Christ. We cannot accept for him a place merely as one of the world's religious teachers. We are but learners and have to listen not only to our fellow Christians of other cultures, but also to our neighbors of other faiths, who may teach us much that we have not understood. But the crucial question is: Which is the real story? To that question our whole life is our answer. There is no neutrality. The answer has to be given not only in the words of the Church, but in a life which follows the way Christ went, and so - in Paul's words - bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, manifests to the world his risen life, the life which is life indeed.²

*What do you think Newbigin means by the "universality" of Christ?

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: Christ's active and passive obedience merited our salvation. His death paid the penalty for our sin. He is the one mediator between God and man, and, therefore, the only savior for the world.

¹ Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith* p. 517

² J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Witnesses to the World* 1987.