

4 Atonement Theories:

1. Classic Christus Victor

- Source: St. John the Divine
- Cosmic battle between the forces of Good and Evil
- Death is needed by: Satan (but God wills it)
- Jesus is killed - an apparent victory of Satan over God
- However God raised Jesus up and turned the tables on Satan.
- The accomplishment of the death is that the souls of sinners are freed from bondage
- A variation on this theme portrays Christ's death as a ransom paid to Satan in exchange for freeing sinners

2. Satisfaction Theory

- Source: Anselm
- God's honor is in the balance because of human sin
- Who needed death: God
- God must balance the scales of sinfulness with the sacrifice of Jesus (who is without blemish or imperfection)
- The accomplishment of the sinless death of Jesus is that it balances out the sinfulness of the world and allows God to restore humanity to a proper relationship

3. Moral Influence Theory

- Source: Peter Abelard
 - Sinful human beings need to see how much God loves them so that they will mend their ways.
 - Who needed the death: God
 - God must sacrifice his son to show how much he loves humanity.
 - The accomplishment of Jesus death was that sinful humans could see the depth of God's love and thus be restored into a loving relationship with God.
- This is the blood theology of the church
 - In each of these theories it is God who wills the death of his Son – for a variety of reasons
 - In each of them the Resurrection is not essential – what needs to be accomplished has been accomplished by the death.

Penal Theory, Sacrificial Theory, Substitutionary Theory

- All of these are variations on the above
- Recent theology has sought an atonement theory that takes us away from blood theology (but recognizing the blood of the act)
 - The modern search is for a non-violent atonement, thus:

4. Narrative Christus Victor

- The non-violent Atonement of Jesus
- Source: J. Denny Weaver (drawing on ancient sources)
- God did not send Jesus to die but sent him to live!
- Who needs the death: Evil powers of empire
- The point of Jesus' life is to show humanity how to live (The way to God - "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me")
- There is no real accomplishment in Jesus' death, but there is in his resurrection

- In this approach the death of Jesus is not the will of God
- In this approach the death of Jesus is not necessary for our salvation.
- Jesus death is at the hands of a world who rejects "the Way"
- Jesus is a martyr for the reign of God!
- The resurrection is God's affirmative "Yes!" to the Way of Jesus! (and is essential to the atonement theory)