

# AT+ONE

## Christian Theories of Atonement

### WHAT IS ATONEMENT?

- ◉ Atonement comes from 16<sup>th</sup> century English - literally means at-one-ment.
- ◉ God's act of dealing with the primary human problem of sin; process of reconciliation between God and human beings with the goal of righting a wrong (sin).
- ◉ In Christianity: how we talk about the salvific work of Jesus Christ.
- ◉ When does God's saving work occur:
  - Incarnation?
  - Life & Ministry of Jesus?
  - Crucifixion?
  - Resurrection?

**Varieties of Atonement & Their Areas of Focus**  
 What act(s) of God through Jesus Christ caused humanity to be atoned to God?

Incarnation	Life & Teaching	Crucifixion	Resurrection
Christus Victor	Moral Exemplar	Penalty Satisfaction / Substitution	Ransom Captive
Incarnational	Healing Servant	Last Scapegoat	
	Solidarity		

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## GOALS OF OUR STUDY

- ◉ NOT to pick one atonement theory over the others
- ◉ But to have open hearts and minds, to see if one resonates with us more than others, and to explore why that may be.
- ◉ To deepen our understanding of what the Bible says about atonement and reconciliation between God and humanity, along with theologians, our creeds, and our hymns.
- ◉ To understand the importance of the entirety of the work in the person of Jesus Christ - from Bethlehem to Pentecost and beyond!

## 1 JOHN 2:1-2

<sup>1</sup>My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; <sup>2</sup>**and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**

## ATONEMENT THROUGH LIFE & TEACHING



## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

Popularized by medieval French theologian Peter Abelard, this theory claims that Jesus' life and death is a powerful enough example of love and obedience to influence sinners to repent of their sins and improve their lives. The Moral Exemplar view of the atonement was the first post-biblical view articulated in the very earliest, post-Apostolic church.

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

- ◉ Luke 19:1-10
- ◉ John 21:15-19
  
- ◉ John 15:9-17
- ◉ Matthew 10:1-8

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

Four ways of seeing this in Jesus:

- ◉ Jesus as Teacher - a majority of the Gospels focuses on Jesus' teachings. These teachings focus largely on individual and social morality, and encourage love.
- ◉ Jesus as Example - many New Testament passages speak of imitating Christ and following his example. The Gospels provide a rich body of material from which early Christians drew examples.

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

- ◉ Jesus as Founder and Leader - the Church movement has a large role in the moral influence view, as its purpose is to continue to morally transform individuals and societies.
- ◉ Jesus as Martyr - Jesus' crucifixion is viewed as a martyrdom, in which he was killed as a consequence of his claim to divinity.

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

- ◉ Jesus' example doesn't give us a list of instructions; it provides us a trajectory, a paradigm, a narrative to live into. Jesus as Moral Exemplar becomes the context which reframes our entire existence.
- ◉ What we are talking about here is the power of story to reshape lives.

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

What this atonement theory grasps in a way the others miss is that a saved life must be a transformed one. And the criteria of a transformed life is whether it conforms to the example of Jesus. I might well suggest, following James, that if Jesus is not your Moral Exemplar then you are not actually saved, because being in Christ means living like him.

-Rev. Aric Clark, PCUSA pastor

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

*Augustine: But if any man love God, the same is known of Him; and that, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us; and many other passages; because he who loves God must both needs do what God has commanded, and loves Him just in such proportion as he does so...And what is there in eternal things more excellent than God, of whom alone the nature is unchangeable?*

## MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORY

God works to bring positive moral change within the hearts of individuals and to transform societies to become more loving. He acted to bring such change through the teachings of the Old Testament Law, the Jewish Prophets, and the teaching and example of Jesus. The inspiring power of Jesus' martyrdom and subsequent resurrection are catalysts for moral change. The Holy Spirit works to help people toward moral change.

## SOLIDARITY THEORY

- Popularized by Tony Jones and Jurgen Moltmann, Jesus' life stands as testimony that he always stood with the marginalized, the poor, the prostitutes and the tax collectors. His death was the result of his life. We are called to identify with Christ's suffering and to stand with those whose experience of being forsaken parallels Christ on the cross.



## SOLIDARITY THEORY

- In an act of ultimate solidarity with every human being who has ever existed, God voluntarily relinquished his godship, in part, in order to truly experience the human condition. And, as the early church hymn recorded in Philippians 2 states so eloquently, God was humbled even to the point of death on a cross.



## SOLIDARITY THEORY



- ◉ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross also enters into the situation of man's godforsakenness...He humbles himself and takes upon himself the eternal death of the godless and the godforsaken, so that all the godless and godforsaken can experience communion with him.*

WHERE DO WE SEE  
ATONEMENT  
THROUGH LIFE &  
MINISTRY?



## BELHAR CONFSSION

- We believe that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
  - that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged
  - that God calls the church to follow him in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
  - that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
  - that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
  - that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
  - that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
  - that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
  - that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

## MY FAITH LOOKS UP TO THEE



3 While life's dark maze I tread  
and griefs around me spread,  
be thou my guide;  
bid darkness turn to day,  
wipe sorrow's tears away,  
nor let me ever stray  
from thee aside.



4 When life's swift race is run,  
 death's cold work almost done,  
 be near to me.  
 Blest Savior, then, in love  
 fear and distrust remove.  
 O bear me safe above,  
 redeemed and free!

## WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS



- ◉ 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
- ◉ See from His head, His hands, His  
 feet  
 Sorrow and love flow mingled down  
 Did ever such love and sorrow meet?  
 Or thorns compose, so rich a crown

## WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS



- ◉ Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were an offering far too small  
**Love so amazing, so divine**  
**Demands my soul, my life, my all**

## JESU, JESU, FILL US WITH YOUR LOVE



Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,  
show us how to serve  
the neighbors we have from you.

1 Kneels at the feet of his friends,  
silently washes their feet,  
Master who acts as a slave to them.  
[Refrain]



3 These are the ones we should serve,  
these are the ones we should love;  
all these are neighbors to us and you.  
[Refrain]

4 Loving puts us on our knees,  
serving as those who are slaves:  
this is the way we should live with you.  
[Refrain]

## COME AND STAND AMAZED, YOU PEOPLE



O Lord Jesus, God incarnate, Who  
assumed this humble form, Counsel  
me and let my wishes To your perfect  
will conform. Light of life, dispel my  
darkness, Let your frailty strengthen  
me; Let your meekness give me  
boldness, Let your burden set me  
free;

## ATONEMENT THROUGH LIFE & EXAMPLE

What difference does this kind of atonement make in the world?



## ATONEMENT THROUGH LIFE & EXAMPLE

Salvation and atonement are not just future possibilities but present realities.

