

The Treasures of the Cross: Part Two

April 26, 2020

Review: Six big ideas we see about the meaning of the cross from a straightforward reading of the Gospels/Acts:

- A. The cross was absolutely necessary and it stands at the center of our story.
 - B. The cross was voluntary and intentional and purposeful.
 - C. There is some kind of rescue, saving, ransoming going on.
 - D. The cross deals with sins somehow and provides forgiveness.
 - E. The cross is connected to the Passover, the New Covenant, and fulfills the OT story
 - F. The cross was a victory of authority for Jesus
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Three Primary Ways of Understanding the Work of the Cross:

Substitution, Victory, Model

BIG IDEA #1: SUBSTITUTION

Jesus Christ takes our place and solves a problem in our stead that we could not solve ourselves.

Key Scriptures that affirm the mechanism of substitution:

The OT sacrificial system, especially the Passover Lamb

The suffering servant of Isaiah 53:6,12

Key New Testament Passages include: Galatians 3:13; Romans 4:25; 1 Peter 2:24

Variations on This Theme:

A. The Ransom Theory: Jesus was paying the cost of getting us out of the legal claim of the devil, due to sin, like getting your car out of the impound lot, or a kidnap story line “take me instead of her.” Sometimes the ransom is paid to the devil, sometimes to death, sometimes to God, sometimes unspecified.

Historical Context: Early. Origen. Augustine. Dominant view the first thousand years of the church, with variations and nuances.

Scriptures typically referenced: Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6

Pros: Takes seriously the specific language of ransom. Recognizes the phenomenon of the devil’s authority in the usurped world (see Matt 4:9; John 14:30

Cons: Anselm and others finds abhorrent that God would concede a payment to the devil or the devil could rightly demand something from God, himself being a rebel and evil.

B. Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory: Jesus was repaying the debt of honor due God rooted in human’s sin and rebellion. Jesus’ obedience and sacrifice was such a huge offering of honor in made up for all the honor humans failed to give God. Jesus pays the debt of owed honor and so there is no need for God to punish humans for the offense.

Historical Context: 1097 Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in his work *Cur Deus Homo*. Anselm is reacting to his disagreement with the ransom theory. He is also influenced by the feudal world in which he lived where peasants were obligated to honor the lords and knights on whose land they lived and who provided their security and protection.

Scriptures typically referenced: Romans 1:23, 3:23; Col 2:14; Rev 4:11

Pros: Takes God’s glory seriously and the gravity of human sin seriously.

Cons: It overlays a feudal architecture over the Bible story. It lays the foundation for the idea of Christ’s “treasury of merit” being doled out to those who earn it by good works.

C. Penal Substitution: The justice of God required a punishment for sin. The appropriate punishment for human sin and rebellion against a Holy God is eternal death. Jesus takes our punishment in our place and thereby satisfies the justice of God (sometimes described as appeasing God's wrath). With the punishment fully meted out on Jesus, there is no more punishment left for humans. Sometimes included in this scheme is the idea that Jesus gives to humans His righteous/innocent credentials in the exchange for their criminal status.

Historical Context: This is a reformation era response to abuses in the Catholic penance system which advocating indulgences and purgatorial time for additional punishment to make a person right before God. The reformers were keen to emphasize the complete and sufficient work of Jesus on the cross. While challenging the penance mechanisms of the church of their day, the reformers retained the underlying concept that punishment of sin was required.

Scriptures typically referenced: Punishments described in the OT law as the principle established in God's economy, Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:25,26, 5:9;

Pros: Makes sense of the idea of justice (how unfair it would be in our world of injustices went unaddressed); takes seriously God's holiness and justice and the gravity of human sin;

Cons: Conflates God's anger with human anger; similar to pagan ideas of appeasing angry deities with human sacrifice, in danger of making God subservient to the Law (or "justice"); sometimes results in a division between God as the angry one and Jesus as the loving one

D. Cleansing Blood: In the ways foreshadowed by Old Testament sacrifices, the death of Jesus and the voluntary spilling of His blood takes the place of the death-consequence

of human entry into and cooperation with sin, and takes away (expiates), purifies, cleanses the toxic pollution of sin and re-inserts life into the place of death, thus healing us, bringing us back into a life-mode which makes possible interaction with a living God.

Historical Context: This is not usually one of the classic models identified. The OT Sacrificial connection is usually subsumed under the Satisfaction Theory or Penal Substitution Theory as a metaphor of those transactions.

Scriptures typically referenced: Hebrews 9:11-28; 10:1-23

Pros: Allows the cross' meaning to rise up naturally out of the Jewish story from which it came, and in particular, the nature of OT sacrifices to cleanse. Takes seriously the connection of Jesus to the Passover Lamb and the other sacrifices. Makes sense of the NT focus on blood. Interprets the cryptic Greek word *hilasterion* ("mercy seat"), referring to the lid of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, which is often translated as "propitiation" (which then serves the Penal Substitution model) or "expiation" (which is more in keeping with the idea of the function of the sacrifice itself).

Cons: Comes dangerously close to conflated Jesus' sacrifice with the idea of pagan human sacrifice

BIG IDEA #2: VICTORY

D. Christus Victor: A reformulation of the earlier "ransom view", In the cross Jesus with the Father was battling, overcoming, and destroying the authority and power of the dark forces of death, the devil, and sin, rescuing us and setting us free from our oppression and slavery to this constellation of forces.

Historical Context: Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, published in 1930

Scriptures typically referenced: Acts 2:24; 1 Cor 2:8; Phil 2:10; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14,15

Pros: Avoids separating Father and Son on either side of a legal problem. Deals with the reality of powers and authorities and rulers. It rises out of Passover and Exodus themes (overcoming Pharaoh!) It reframes the Ransom Theory to take away the problem of negotiating with a terrorist. It makes sense of the authority Christ wins on the cross.

Cons: It is not immediately clear how this victory relates to the problem of sin and human culpability (although NT Wright will propose a good solution to this).

BIG IDEA #3: MODEL

E. Model of Love: In the cross Jesus models what absolute obedience to God and love for others looks like, thereby establishing the model for His followers to imitate and winning over the love of the world in His demonstration of how much He loved. Thus the goal of the cross is not to appease God but to influence humankind by impressing them with love, softening their hearts, and leading them to repentance.

Historical Context: Proposed by Peter Abelard (1079-11420) in response to Anselm's Satisfaction Theory

Scriptures typically referenced: John 3:16; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 5:2

Pros: Identifies the primary motivation of God and Jesus in the work of the cross as love. As opposed to transactional forces of debt payment or punishment. Highlights the noble character and unbelievable sacrifice of Jesus, and sets up the high-bar example of imitation for all of Jesus' followers.

Cons: For some, this view fails to offer any clear mechanism for the forgiveness of sins, other than God's free choice. Fails to give an account for the "wrath passages" in the Bible.

Some Final Things to Consider for Today:

1. All of these ideas are present in the Scriptures.
2. The nature of the history of ideas: ping-pong of reaction
3. The goal of synthesis
4. Synthesis from inside the story, not outside of it
5. Determine the GOAL (5/3), the PROBLEM (5/10), and the SOLUTION (5/17)
6. The analogy of the car: we don't need to fully understand how it works to be able to get from here to there, but understanding its inner workings increases our amazement and confidence.
7. Here's what we do know (even if the "how" is somewhat muddy):
 - a. That we are forgiven of our sins. There is now no condemnation.
 - b. That we are freed from the power of sin's enslavement. We can do good.
 - c. Death no longer has the final word over our lives.
 - d. Physical death is now merely a doorway into on-going forever life.
 - e. This life will be life as embodied fully-human persons reigning with Christ as His bride over the new heavens and the new earth in the glorious presence of God.