

Fathom Academy: Christian Theology

WEEK 8: SOTERIOLOGY PT. 1

fathomchurch.org/academy

Week 8: The Work of Christ: Life & Death

[Soteriology Pt. 1]

The Work of Christ [*Soteriology*I]

Part I: Introduction and Definitions

Part II: Atonement Images in the Biblical Witness

Part III: Theories of the Atonement in Christian Theology

Part IV: Conclusions and Implications

Part I: Introduction and Definitions

Soteriology: Definitions

- **Soteriology:** The investigation of that work of God by which he delivers his creatures from sin and death in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
 - **Etymology:** σωτηρία [*sōteria*] – deliverance, release, liberation
- **Atonement:** “that by which God has bridged over the gulf which separated between what sin has made us, and what it was the desire of the divine love that we should become.” (John McLeod Campbell)
- **Propitiation (Expiation):** The turning away of wrath by means of an offering or sacrifice. Often related to the Greek ἱλαστήριον [*hilastērion*], the mercy seat upon which sins are forgiven.

Soteriology: Tasks

“The Christian doctrine of sin tries to give an account of what went wrong; the doctrine of salvation deals with the restoration of the created order, and above all humanity, to its proper relationship to God.”

Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*

Part II: Atonement Images in the Biblical Witness

Atonement Images in the Gospels

- **“A Ransom for Many” (Mark 10:45, Matt. 20:28)**
- **The Lamb that was Slain (John 1:29; cf. Rev. 5:12)**
- **Paschal Sacrifice of the New Covenant (Mark 14:24)**

The Takeaway: The Gospels envision the death of Jesus as ransom for sin and as sacrifice, but they do not unpack the mechanics of the atonement.

Atonement Images in the Pauline Corpus

- **Reconciliation of All Things to God**
- **Cross as Triumph over the Powers**
- **Cross as Substitutionary Propitiation**
- **Ransom / Redemption**

The Takeaway: Paul uses a wide range of images—from reconciliation of estranged parties to imperial victory to cultic sacrifice to manumission of slaves—to capture the saving work of Christ.

Atonement Images in the Wider NT

- **Final and Sufficient Sacrifice (Hebrews 9:26–28)**
- **Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 12:22–24)**
- **Ransomed by the Blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19)**
- **Christ as the one who “bore our sins in his body on the tree.” (1 Peter 2:24)**

The Takeaway: NT authors thought of Jesus as the climax and end of Israel’s sacrificial system and his death as bearing the weight and penalty of sin.

Part III: Theories of the Atonement in Christian Theology

“The marvellous and mighty paradox”

“The supreme object of his coming was to bring about the resurrection of the body. This was to be the monument of his victory over death, the assurance to all that he had himself conquered corruption, and that their own bodies also would eventually be incorrupt; and it was in token of that as a pledge of the future resurrection that he kept his body incorrupt. . . . by Christ death was destroyed, and the corruption that goes with it resolved and brought to an end.”

Athanasius [296–373], *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi*(4.22, 5.29)



The Son of God, “when he had become incarnate, and was made man . . . summed up in himself [*in seipso recapitulavit*] the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation, so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—we might recover in Christ Jesus.”

Irenaeus of Lyons [130–202], *Adversus Haereses* (3.18.1)

In order to secure that the thing offered in exchange on our behalf might be more easily accepted by him who demanded it, the Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as is done by greedy fish, the hook of Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of the flesh.”

Gregory of Nyssa [335–94], *Oratio Catechetica Magna*

“The man who does not render to God this honor, which is his due, takes away from God what is his own, and dishonors him, and this is sin. . . . Everyone who sins ought to render back to God the honor he has taken away, and this is the *satisfaction* which every sinner ought to make to God. . . . [Yet] I have nothing to render to him in compensation for sin.”

Anselm of Canterbury [1033–1109], *Cur Deus Homo?*(1.11)

“I think, therefore, that the purpose and cause of the incarnation was that he might illuminate the world by his wisdom and excite it to the love of himself.”

Peter Abelard [1079–1142], *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*

“Because an eternal, unchangeable sentence of condemnation has been passed—for God cannot and will not regard sin with favor, but his wrath abides upon it eternally and irrevocably—redemption was not possible without a ransom of such precarious worth as to atone for sin, to assume its guilt, pay the price of the wrath and thus abolish sin. This no creature was able to do. There was no remedy except for God’s only Son to step into our distress and himself become man, to take upon himself the load of awful and eternal wrath and make his own body and blood a sacrifice for sin. And he did so, out of the immeasurably great mercy and love towards us, giving himself up and bearing the sentence of unending wrath and death.”

**Martin Luther [1483–1546], *Epistle Sermon,*
*Twenty-fourth Sunday after Trinity***

Part IV: Conclusions and Implications

Concluding Observations

- **Models are Not Mutually Exclusive**
- **Is the atonement *constitutive* or *illustrative*?**
- **“There is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:10–12)**