

CHRISTOLOGY

III. Christ in Suffering and Death

I. Suffering

- A. Non-atoning Sufferings: Christ's daily testings, wilderness temptation, Gethsemane temptation, trial testings, etc. are all important to show that Jesus Christ could not sin and that he loved men but these sufferings did not atone for sin.
- B. Atoning Sufferings
1. It was destined that Messiah should suffer (Luke 24:24, 26; 1 Peter 1:11).
Suffering for sin is fundamental to the work of Christ.
 2. The atoning suffering includes only that suffering on the cross for sin where Christ bore in His sinless body the sins of men.
- C. After Death Sufferings: There is a sense in which our Lord still suffers even after resurrection and ascension. In Acts 9:4 our Lord said to Saul, "Saul, why do you persecute Me?" When Saul was persecuting Peter, John, James and other Christians, he was persecuting the Lord Jesus. All members of the family of God are one body with the Lord Jesus at the head. When the body suffers, Christ suffers.

II. Death

- A. Importance: Christ's death is important because (1) It is foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 53 cf. Luke 24:27, 44); (2) It is mentioned 175 times in the New Testament; (3) It is the primary purpose of the incarnation (Matt. 20:28; Heb. 2:9-14; (4) It is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-3).
- B. Description
1. A substitution: Christ died in place of the sinner (2 Cor. 5:21).
 2. A ransom: The death of Christ paid the price of the penalty for sin (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6).
 3. A redemption: The death of Christ purchased men out of the slave market of sin (Eph. 1:7).
 4. A reconciliation: The death of Christ changed men from the position of an enemy to that of a friend (2 Cor. 5:18-19).
 5. A propitiation: Christ's death satisfied the holy and righteous demands of God against sin (1 John 2:2).
 6. A demonstration: The death of Christ was a proof of the love of God (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16).
- C. False Theories on the Atonement
1. Ransom To Satan Theory: This view also called the "military" or "Patristic" theory, as advocated by Origen, regarded Christ's death as a ransom paid to Satan to free man from sin; but Satan was deceived in the bargain, for he could not retain his hold on the Son of God who rose from the dead. In the conflict between the forces of Christ and the forces of evil, Christ wins the battle at the cross. TRUTH: Christ did break the power of Satan at the cross. ERROR: The Bible clearly states that the ransom was paid to God not to Satan.
 2. Recapitulation Theory: This theory, advocated by Irenaeus, viewed Christ as recapitulating in Himself the stages of human life so that He reverses the course on which Adam started humanity by the Fall. Christ's obedience compensated for the disobedience of Adam. TRUTH: There is a sense that as the Last Adam, Jesus Christ, is restoring things to its rightful place, reversing the trend of the Fall (1 Cor. 15:45-49). ERROR: The Bible states the atonement was a

- substitution.
3. Marturial Theory: Christ died as a martyr to the truth he proclaimed and his death was the confirmation of his doctrine and it exemplified his sincerity. TRUTH: There is a sense in which Christ was a martyr (John 18:37). ERROR: Christ was more than a martyr (John 10:18).
 4. Satisfaction Theory: This is sometimes called the “commercial” theory and was held by Anselm. Anselm found the reason for the atonement in God’s honor rather than His justice and holiness. This view states that man’s sin offended God’s honor and that God chose the death of Christ to satisfy or vindicate that honor. Thus Christ was rewarded with merit for His death and this merit is passed on to those that are obedient. TRUTH: This view does see that God needed satisfaction. ERROR: It fails to see the substitutionary aspect of atonement and deemphasizes faith.
 5. Moral Influence Theory: This view, held by Abelard, and followed by many modern-day liberals such as Bushnell, regards Christ’s death merely as an object lesson of God’s love — His sufferings were to soften people’s hearts and lead them to repentance. This view reduces the atonement to a “passion play” instead of a judicial courtroom or sacrificial courtyard. TRUTH: The atonement does reveal God’s love (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16). ERROR: This view does not recognize the satisfaction that comes to God because of Christ’s substitutionary death for sin.
 6. Example Theory: This view, held by Socinius, states that Christ died to show us the way of faith and obedience and this leads to eternal life when one follows this example of Christ. TRUTH: The Lord is an example of faith and obedience (Heb. 12:2). ERROR: The Lord is more than an example (1 Pet. 3-18; Matt. 20:28).
 7. Governmental Theory: This view, held by Grotius and followed by many Arminians, held that in order to maintain respect for divine law and government, the Father sent the son to make a token-payment for sin (an incomplete payment); this view reduces Christ’s death to an object lesson of God’s hatred of sin and shows what will happen if a person doesn’t repent. TRUTH: The wrath of God will come down upon those who fail to repent (Ex. 34:7; Nahum 1:3). ERROR: This view makes it possible for a believer to be released without the justice of God being satisfied through substitution. Thus this view has no real justice satisfied and the cross becomes only a symbol.
 8. Neoorthodox Theory: This view, held by Barth and Brunner, regards the death of Christ as a revelation of God’s love and the sinfulness of man. TRUTH: The cross does tell us of God’s love and man’s sinfulness. ERROR: The death of Christ is not just a revelation; it is an actual substitution for sins that satisfies God’s righteous demands against sin.
 9. Other views include the “mystical” theory of Irving, the “vicarious repentance” theory of Cambell, the “ethical” theory of Strong, and the “moral order” theory of Conner.
- D. The Correct View of the Atonement: The right view is penal satisfaction by substitution. The Lord’s death was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin (1 Pet. 3:18; Matt. 20:28) which satisfied the holy demands of God against sin (Rom. 3:25-26) and this substitutionary atonement was rendered by Christ in place of sinners (Mark 10:45). The atonement was a work of the Trinity (2 Cor. 5:21; John 10:18; Heb. 9:14).