

CLASS #5: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023

ANNOUNCEMENT: CHANGE IN REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE:

3/15, 3/22, 3/29,

4/5 – No Class (Holy Week)

4/12 – No Class (Vacation Break)

4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10, 5/17

Sunday, March 19, 2023 – Lectionary Readings

23rd Psalm Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill

John 9:1-41 The Inclusive Bible – Attached.

From Gail Kieser:

“If He [Jesus] wasn’t God,” Stephen Barkley said, “then God was in Him in some manner that we can’t understand. Look at the facts! Hundreds of men, thousands probably, died on crosses, crucified. It was one of man’s favorite barbarisms over a long period of time. Nobody knows anything about them except the One. This was no obscure death, even though it occurred in an obscure place. The whole world was destined to know about it, and did, and does. The world changed, and is still changing, because of it. No man ever made such a mark on history. Jesus Christ wasn’t an ordinary man and he didn’t speak with an ordinary, human tongue.”

From The Empty Shrine, by William Barrett, 1958.

Attachments for suggested readings (Handouts):

“What Atonement Theories Tell Us About Our Politics” – Christianity Today
March 21, 2022: [Online Link](#)

Living the Questions, “Chapter 1: And Invitation to the Journey” p. 3-10
David M. Feiten & Jeff Proctor Murphy; Harper One, 2012.

A. LENT & ATONEMENT THEORIES

University of Notre Dame Education Department

Three theories of the Atonement [As presented, without modification. Please do so.]

A central part of Christian doctrine is that Christ died for us. More specifically, it is held that Christ died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. In this way, Christ's death is supposed to be a crucial element of God's plan for our salvation. This event — Christ's death making possible our salvation — is called 'the Atonement.'

The Atonement raises a number of different interrelated philosophical questions:

- 1) Why did Christ die on the cross?
- 2) How does Christ dying make it possible for our sins to be forgiven?
- 3) If God is omnipotent, why couldn't God forgive our sins without Christ dying?

A theory of the Atonement is an attempt to answer questions like these three.

We can distinguish three different theories of the atonement.

1. MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORIES

One sort of theory, which is often described but rarely advocated, is that the purpose of the Crucifixion is to provide us with an example of a morally perfect life, which we might then imitate in an attempt to reconcile ourselves to God.

Two problems for moral exemplar theories: (i) Pelagianism, (See following) (ii) the problem of understanding why death on the cross would be morally exemplary if it did not also have some other more central purpose in explaining salvation.

2. THE RANSOM THEORY

An early model of the atonement emphasizes Christ's death as a ransom. One finds this language also in the Catechism, which says that the Crucifixion is "the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin."

But if Christ's death was a ransom, to whom was it paid, and for what?

The traditional answer to this question is that it was a ransom paid to Satan. The idea is that by sinning, human beings have freely put themselves in Satan's power. God wishes to free us from Satan, and hence from death.

So God has to offer Satan something for which Satan is willing to trade all of us. God's idea is then to send Jesus to earth in human form. Satan is fooled into thinking that Jesus is human, but not God. But Satan sees Jesus performing miracles, and so thinks of Jesus as more valuable than the rest of humanity combined. As Gregory of Nyssa put it,

'When the enemy saw the power, he recognized in Christ a bargain which offered him more than he held. For this reason he chose him as the ransom for those whom he had shut up in death's prison.'

Satan can't condemn Jesus to death by tempting him into sin. So the only way for Satan to trap Jesus is to trade the human beings in his power — all of us — for Jesus. God's triumph over Satan then comes with the resurrection.

Anselm gave several objections to this theory: (i) it seems to make God less than omnipotent; (ii) it is mysterious why God should have to respect any supposed claim that Satan has on us; (iii) it makes God a deceiver.

3. SATISFACTION/PUNISHMENT THEORIES

(St.) Anselm was the first to defend a family of views which, since then, have been the most popular approach to the Atonement.

These views include theses of the following sort:

- Our sins have effect X
- X requires us to be punished with death unless Y is done
- We are unable to do Y
- Christ's death does Y

On Anselm's theory, X=taking away honor from God, and Y=repaying God for this.

The reason why we are unable to repay God for this is that, as Anselm put it,

‘No member of the human race except Christ ever gave to God, by dying, anything which that person was not at some time going to lose as a matter of necessity. Nor did anyone ever pay a debt to God which he did not owe. But Christ of his own accord gave to his Father what he was never going to lose as a matter of necessity, and he paid, on behalf of sinners, a debt which he did not owe. ... He was in no way needy on his own account, or subject to compulsion from others, to whom he owed nothing, unless it was punishment that he owed them. Nevertheless, he gave his life...’

Christ gave more than he owed the Father, so the Father owed him a reward. Christ, of his own free will, decides to reward the people who have killed him by freeing them from death.

This is sometimes called a *satisfaction* theory. On this kind of theory, Jesus gives to the Father something more than Jesus owed, and which then can be a reparation for our sins.

Two objections to Anselm's theory: (i) is honor really this important, and does it make sense to say that we have taken away honor from God? (ii) why on this view is the Crucifixion required? Why wouldn't simply coming to earth as a human being be enough?

B. PELAGIANISM:

Pelagianism is a Christian theological position that holds that the original sin did not taint human nature and that humans by divine grace have free will to achieve human perfection.

Also called “Pelagian Heresy”, it is a 5th Century *heresy* taught by Pelagius. A simple search of his name will provide you with interesting information, especially concerning Augustine’s rebuttal of Pelagius and Pelagius’ eventual excommunication in the early 5th Century.

Pelagius’ followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will. Pelagius was concerned about the slack moral standards among Christians, and he hoped to improve their conduct by his teachings. Rejecting the arguments of those who claimed that they sinned because of human weakness, he insisted that God made human beings free to choose between good and evil and that sin is a voluntary act committed by a person against God’s law. Celestius, a disciple of Pelagius, denied the church’s doctrine of original sin and the necessity of infant baptism.

C. Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill– 23rd Psalm

O my Beloved, You are my shepherd,

I shall not want;

You bring me to green pastures

for rest

and lead me beside still waters

renewing my spirit;

You restore my soul.

You lead me in the path of

Goodness

to follow Love's way.

Even though I walk through the

valley of the shadow

and of death,

I am not afraid;

For You are every with me;

Your rod and staff

they guide me,

and comfort.

You prepare a table before me

In the presence of all my fears;

you bless me with oil,

my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy will

follow me

All the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the heart

Of the Beloved forever. Amen.

D. John 9:1-41

^{9:1} As Jesus walked along, he saw someone who had been blind from birth. ² The disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, was it this individual’s sin that caused the blindness, or that of the parents?”

³ “Neither,” answered Jesus,

“It wasn’t because of anyone’s sin—
not this person’s, nor the parents’.

Rather, it was to let God’s works shine forth
in this person.

⁴ We must do the deeds of the One who sent me
while it is still day—
for night is coming,
when no one can work.

While I am in the world,
I am the light of the world.”

⁶ With that, Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva and smeared the blind one’s eyes with the mud. ⁷ Then Jesus said, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”—“Siloam” means “sent.” So the person went off to wash, and came back able to see.

⁸ Neighbors and those who had been accustomed to seeing the blind beggar began to ask, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said yes; others said no—the one who had been healed simply looked like the beggar.

But the individual in question said, “No—it was me.” ¹⁰

The people then asked, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

¹¹ The answer came, “The one they call Jesus made mud and smeared it on my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash. When I went and washed, I was able to see.”

¹² “Where is Jesus?” they asked. The person replied, “I have no idea.”

¹³ They took the one who had been born blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ It had been on a Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud paste and opened this one’s eyes. ¹⁵ The Pharisees asked how the individual could see. They were told, “Jesus put mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see.”

¹⁶ This prompted some Pharisees to say, “This Jesus cannot be from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others argued, “But how could a sinner perform signs like these?” They were sharply divided.

¹⁷ Then they addressed the blind person again: “Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about this Jesus?”

“He’s a prophet,” came the reply. ¹⁸ The Temple authorities refused to believe that this one had been blind and had begun to see, until they summoned the parents.

¹⁹ “Is this your child?” they asked, “and if so, do you attest that your child was blind at birth? How do you account for the fact that now your child can see?”

²⁰ The parents answered, “We know this is our child, blind from birth. ²¹ But how our child can see now, or who opened those blind eyes, we have no idea. But don’t ask us—our child is old enough to speak without us!” ²² The parents answered this way because they were afraid of the Temple authorities, who had already agreed among themselves that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why they said, “Our child is of age and should be asked directly.”

²⁴ A second time they summoned the one who had been born blind and said, “Give God the glory instead; we know that this Jesus is a sinner.”

²⁵ “I don’t know whether he is a sinner or not,” the individual answered. “All I know is that I used to be blind, and now I can see.”

²⁶ They persisted, “Just what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ “I already told you, but you won’t listen to me,” came the answer. “Why do you want to hear it all over again? Don’t tell me you want to become disciples of Jesus too!”

²⁸ They retorted scornfully, “You’re the one who is Jesus’ disciple. We’re disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this Jesus comes from.”

³⁰ The other retorted: “Well, this is news! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes! ³¹ We know that God doesn’t hear sinners, but that if people are devout and obey God’s will, God listens to them. ³² It is unheard of that anyone ever gave sight to a person blind from birth. ³³ If this one were not from God, he could never have done such a thing!”

³⁴ “What!” they exclaimed. “You’re steeped in sin from birth, and you’re giving us lectures?” With that they threw the person out.

³⁵ When Jesus heard of the expulsion, he sought out the healed one and asked, “Do you believe in the Chosen One?”

³⁶ The other answered, “Who is this One, that I may believe?”

³⁷ “You’re looking at him,” Jesus replied. “The Chosen One is speaking to you now.”

³⁸ The healed one said, “Yes, I believe,” and worshiped Jesus.

³⁹ And Jesus said, “I came into this world to execute justice—to make the sightless see and the seeing blind.”

⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard this and said, “You’re not calling us blind, are you?”

⁴¹ To which Jesus replied, “If you were blind, there would be no sin in that. But since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

End of 3.15.23