

God is holy and just.

Forgiveness of sinful human beings apart from the exercise of the judgment due their sin would be in contradiction of God's character.

The resolution of this theological dilemma, and the core of the gospel, is found in the work of Jesus Christ. In the cross God's wrath is poured out and his love is demonstrated, and he shows himself to be just even while justifying sinners (cf. Rom. 3:25-26).

The institutions of Israel provide the categories by which to understand the work of Christ as he fulfills the roles of -

Prophet - revealing the grace and truth of God as his perfect image;

Priest - representing and redeeming a sinful people;

King - exercising the authority of God in reigning over his creation.

Our statement on *The Work of Christ* focuses on his priestly role through which he effects our salvation by his atoning sacrifice on the cross.

I. Of Central Importance:
Jesus Christ Shed His Blood on the Cross

The Evangelists, in various ways, present the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem as the focal point of the gospel story.

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Jesus was born to die, his chosen vocation (Jn. 10:18). He submitted to the Father's will (Matt. 26:41). He fully completed his task (Jn. 19:30).

Why did Jesus die? What is the meaning of this cruel death on a cross? What did it accomplish?

The NT proclaims that Jesus died “for our sins” (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18; Rom. 3:25-26; 5:8), implying that Jesus’ death provides the means by which our sins are forgiven or taken away (Eph. 1:7).

Jesus’ gave his life as a “ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45; Matt. 20:28).

Jesus shed his blood to establish the new covenant, the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28).

- Passover lamb (Ex. 12).
- Sacrifices (cf. Heb. 9:22).
- Life poured out (Lev. 17:11).

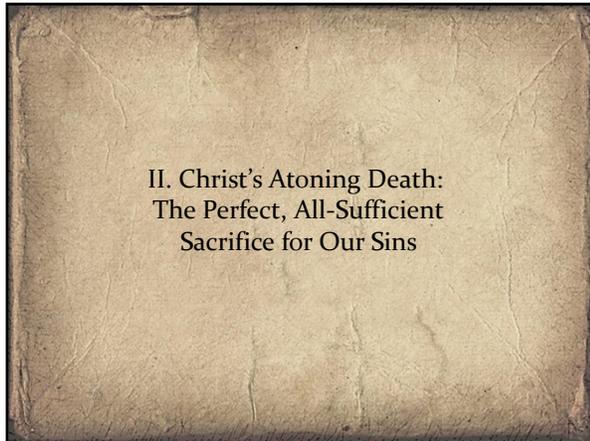
Paul affirms: Redemption and forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; cf. 2:13; Col. 1:20; Rom. 3:25; 5:9).

John concludes: cleansed from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7; cf. Rev. 1:5; 12:11).

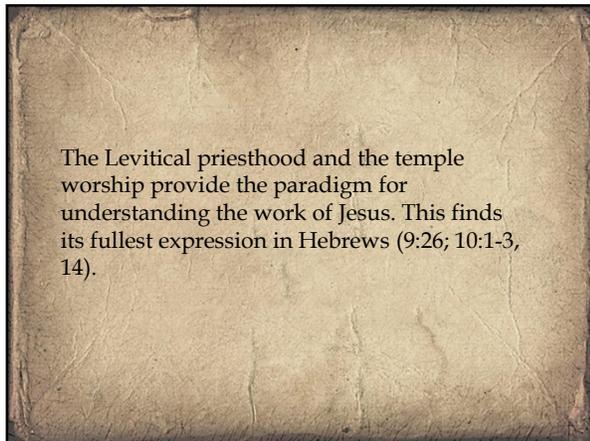
Hebrews states: eternal redemption and pure conscience (Heb. 9:10-14; 10:19)

Peter writes: ransomed (1 Pet. 1:19; cf. Jn. 1:29).

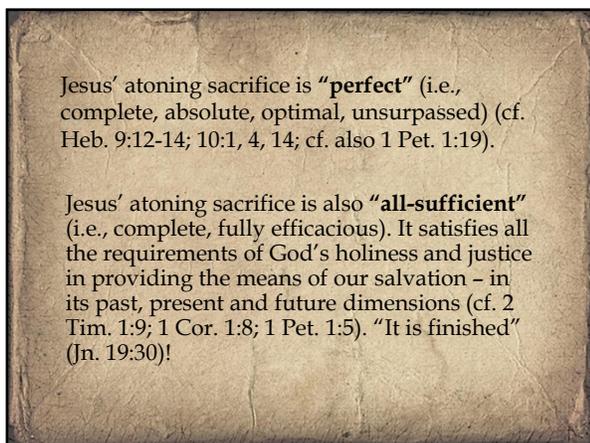
Jesus’ death must be seen as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.



II. Christ's Atoning Death:
The Perfect, All-Sufficient
Sacrifice for Our Sins

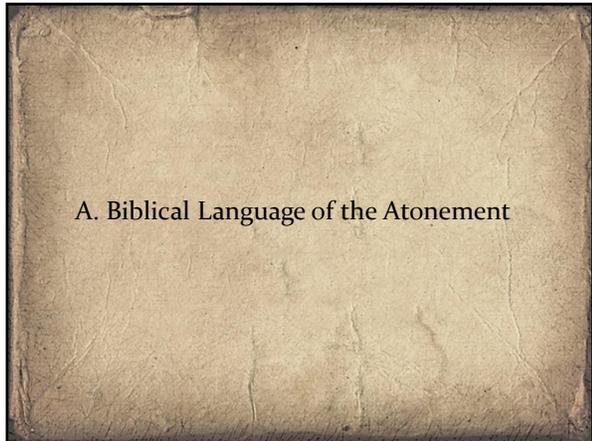


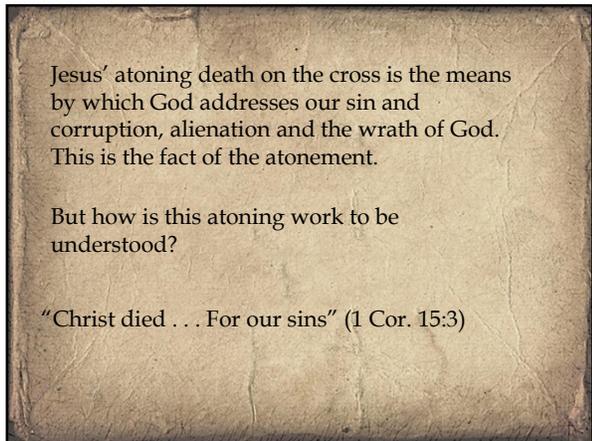
The Levitical priesthood and the temple worship provide the paradigm for understanding the work of Jesus. This finds its fullest expression in Hebrews (9:26; 10:1-3, 14).



Jesus' atoning sacrifice is **"perfect"** (i.e., complete, absolute, optimal, unsurpassed) (cf. Heb. 9:12-14; 10:1, 4, 14; cf. also 1 Pet. 1:19).

Jesus' atoning sacrifice is also **"all-sufficient"** (i.e., complete, fully efficacious). It satisfies all the requirements of God's holiness and justice in providing the means of our salvation - in its past, present and future dimensions (cf. 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:5). "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30)!







Family - Adoption: estrangement and alienation; adoption and reconciliation.

Law-court - Judge: wrath and condemnation; propitiation. In his magisterial exposition of the gospel, Paul sets forth the revelation of the wrath of God as the central obstacle to be overcome (Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8). All humanity stands under the righteous judgment of God (2:2-3; 3:9-20), whose just sentence is death (1:32; 5:12; 6:23). But in Christ, and through his atoning death, we are rescued from that condemnation (3:21-26; 8:1, 33-34). God as Judge acts to justify those who believe in Christ. It is Christ alone who can rescue us from that divine wrath (1 Thess. 1:10).

B. Theological Views of the Atonement

**SUBJECTIVE - THE EFFECT
CHRIST'S DEATH HAS ON OUR
OWN MORAL STATE.**

Moral Influence Theory - Pelagius (died c. 424), Peter Abelard (1079-1142), Faustus Socinius (1539-1604), Liberals.

Governmental Theory - Hugo Grotius (1583-1645).

Waldenstromian Theory - Peter Paul Waldenstrom, J. G. Princell (Swedish EFCA)

While the subjective views of the atonement stress the effect of Christ's work on our moral condition, they fail to account for the depth of human depravity or the reality of God's opposition to sin. They highlight Jesus' role as of Prophet, revealing God to us, rather than his role as Priest . And while these perspectives convey truth about the power of the cross to affect us, they are sorely inadequate on their own. There must be a vital connection between the loving sacrifice of Christ's death and the situation of the sinner.

OBJECTIVE - THE EFFECT CHRIST'S DEATH IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM, INCLUDING GOD'S POSTURE TOWARDS US.

King - conquest over evil. This explains the battlefield imagery, it is insufficient to explain the atoning work. It fails to spell out how the power of Satan was defeated. (The cross was not a big hook that Satan bit only to find out he was tricked, cf. Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330-395).

Liberating Ransom - This is a graphic image, but it is not clear to whom the price of redemption is paid, for certainly Satan had no lawful rights over the human race.

Judge, understood in a forensic or legal manner.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), *Why Did God Become Man?* - satisfaction and vicarious sacrifice. Atonement is seen as a payment of human debt to God by a substitute which God himself provides.

Weakness - reduce God's actions to logic; medieval notions of honor, reflecting the feudal society of the day.

Anselm influenced Thomas Aquinas and the 16th century Reformers, specifically Luther and Calvin. Their efforts resulted in an approach that best captures the heart of the biblical teaching of Christ's atonement, while embracing the other views as well: the notion of *penal substitution*. Claiming this view "captures the heart" or is "central" is not to conclude this view exhausts the biblical teaching on Jesus' work in the cross.

1. Jesus, Our Substitute:
Penal Substitution

Substitute = Penal substitution: Jesus, the Righteous One, died in our place, paying the penalty that we deserved, thus satisfying God's justice. God's wrath is thereby appeased, reconciling sinners to a holy God, such that his forgiveness does not compromise his holiness. This process is God-initiated, and is, from beginning to end, an expression of God's love and grace.

- With the Reformers, there was a renewed interest in justification: how could a sinner be made right with God?
- Romans 3:21-26 supported the notion of "satisfaction." In the death of Jesus, God substituted himself, thereby demonstrating his own righteousness. In 3:25, Jesus is the hilasterion, the propitiating sacrifice, which turns away the righteous wrath of God toward sinners (cf. 5:9), bringing reconciliation (5:1, 10).

Fundamental to substitution and propitiation is the notion that the Righteous One dies in the place of the unrighteous:

- 1 Peter 3:18
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 (imputation - double exchange: union with Adam; union with Christ)
- Galatians 3:13 ("crucifixion" and "curse" (Dt. 21:22-23) was transformed in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus)

The notion of vicarious suffering was rooted in the sacrificial system established by God in the Old Testament:

- Passover (Ex. 12)
- Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)

But they were temporary (note finality of hapax, "once for all," cf. Heb. 9:26, 28; 10:11, 14)!

Substitution lies at the heart of both sin and salvation (Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 160):

"The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God along; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone."

Penal substitution is often linked with a propitiatory aspect of Christ's atoning death, that is, the atoning work of Christ is the foundation for the forgiveness of sin and it also cleanses a person from sin (expiation), and it also is the basis upon which the wrath of God is appeased (propitiation).

THREE COMMON OBJECTIONS TO THIS VIEW

"At the root of every caricature of the cross there lies a distorted Christology."
(Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 160).

Objection 1: Is it even coherent to contend that God in his love can satisfy his own wrath against human sin?

- These need not be logically incompatible, though their connections may remain a mystery.
- We are compelled by the teaching of Scripture to hold both of these together.

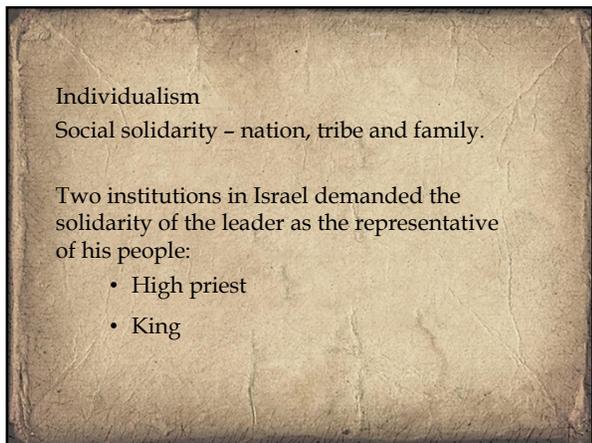
Objection 2: God the Father is a vindictive agent of wrath who must be cajoled into acting graciously toward his human agents.

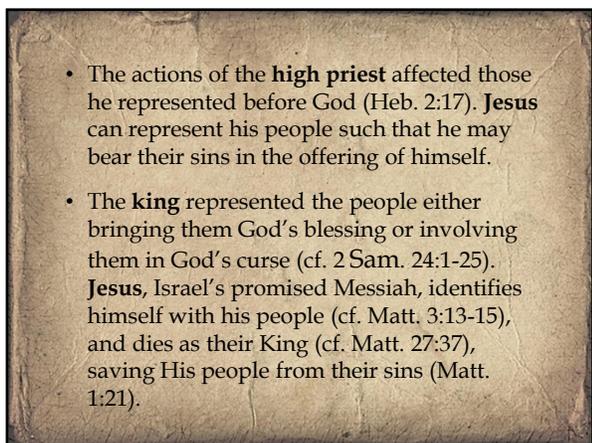
- Truth.
- Unity of the triune God.
- Two parties, not three - God in Christ and humanity.

Objection 3: How can one person take on the punishment of another? Is this just "legal fiction"?

- Jesus is not only fully/truly God, but he is also fully/truly man.
- There is one mediator who gave himself as a ransom (1 Tim. 2:5-6).
- Christ can act as our substitute only because he has first united himself with us as our representative.



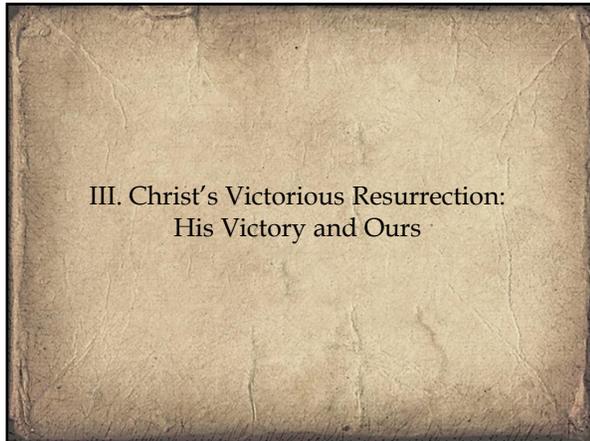


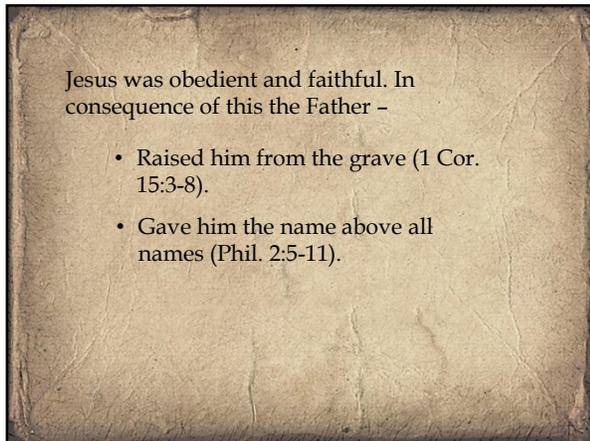


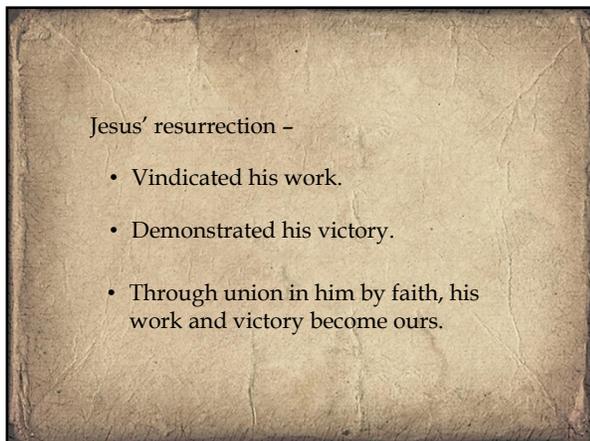
Paul speaks of our solidarity with Adam as our representative head, and so it is with Christ (Rom. 5:12-21). In **our union with Adam by nature**, his sin brings death to us; in **our union with Christ by faith**, his obedience brings us righteousness and life. These two are the great representative figures of the human race.

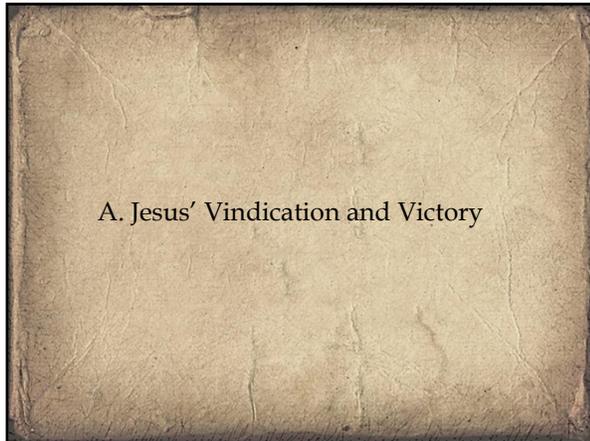
Because of Jesus' union with us in his humanity as the second Adam, as the **Messianic King**, and as our great **High Priest**, he is able to represent us before God. He bears our sin, and, in our union with him, we receive his righteousness.

- In his atoning death Jesus acts in our stead and on our behalf. As our **substitute**, he does what we could never do for ourselves - he bears our sin and judgment, and he takes it away.
- As our **representative** he acts on our behalf in such a way as to involve us in what he has done. Jesus goes to his death alone, but he calls us to take up our cross and follow him in the new life that is ours by virtue of our union with him.

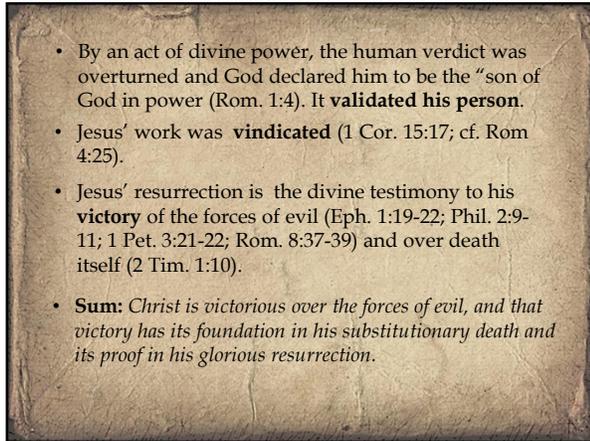




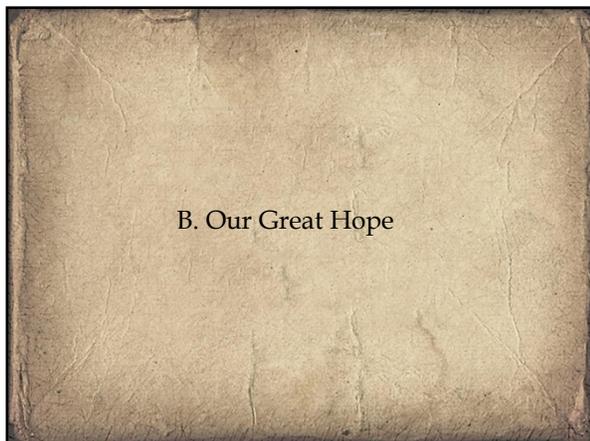




A. Jesus' Vindication and Victory



- By an act of divine power, the human verdict was overturned and God declared him to be the "son of God in power (Rom. 1:4). It **validated his person**.
- Jesus' work was **vindicated** (1 Cor. 15:17; cf. Rom 4:25).
- Jesus' resurrection is the divine testimony to his **victory** of the forces of evil (Eph. 1:19-22; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 3:21-22; Rom. 8:37-39) and over death itself (2 Tim. 1:10).
- **Sum:** *Christ is victorious over the forces of evil, and that victory has its foundation in his substitutionary death and its proof in his glorious resurrection.*



B. Our Great Hope

Through our union with Christ, his resurrection involves and effects us (Col. 1:18; cf. Rev. 1:5).

- Firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20).
- End-of-world event has broken into the present (Acts 26:23).
- Promise of glorification (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:20-21).
- Our great hope (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3-4).

We have that end-time life now!

- We have been raised and are seated with him (Col. 3:1; Eph. 2:6).
- Christ's righteousness is ours (cf. Phil. 3:9).
- We are liberated from our captivity to sin (Rom. 6:6-7).
- The power of the spiritual forces of evil has been broken (Col. 2:15).
- We have tasted the powers of the coming age (Heb. 6:5).

IV. Conclusion:
The Only Ground for Salvation

On the cross Jesus atoned for our sin, bearing its punishment in our stead. There was displayed all at once the fire of God's holiness, the darkness of our sin, and the depth of God's gracious love. There, in a mysterious way, God's wrath and mercy met, perfectly. And on the third day, when he raised Jesus from the grave, God vindicated his Son and brought victory over sin and death.

God need not have saved anyone; but in his holy love, having purposed from eternity to redeem a people for himself, he determined to save us through the work of his Son. Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (Matt. 26:39). In the wisdom of God, it was not possible any other way. Christ's atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for our salvation.