

The Death of Jesus

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger."
(Lam 1:12 ESV)

- ⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.
- ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?"
- ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,
- ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.
- ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
- ¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
- ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,
- ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

- ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."
- ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,
- ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.
- ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham.
- ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.
- ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Hebrews 2:5-18

A Controversial Death

THE DEATH OF CHRIST. There can scarcely be a more controversial subject either without or within Christianity. Unbelievers, knowing not the sacred ground which they tread underfoot, deny it or mock it. Some **deny** the most overwhelming data for any human being in the historical record, that there even was a Jesus. Therefore, he could not

die. **Others**, knowing that they cannot escape reality, deny that he died at the time the Gospels says that he did: on a cross. For instance, the so-called **Swoon Theory** teaches that Jesus was not actually dead on the cross, but that he was only “**mostly dead**,” which as **Miracle Max** says is a big difference from being “all dead.” Mostly dead is slightly alive. So, supposedly, at the hands of utterly incompetent Roman soldiers—who would have been put to death for doing this—Jesus was taken off the cross while he was still alive after which, as various versions of the theory go on to explain, he was able to make a full recovery and live a long, happy, quiet life (though, of course, his evil disciples decided to trick the whole world into believing that he really died and was raised from the dead, so that they could start a new religion, become world famous, and make lots of money). And then, of course, there is the **Complacency Denial Theory**: I deny that I even have to think about this. Much better to pretend none of it exists. That is probably how most people deal with it.

Others though, as I said, **mock**. From the incessant, unrelenting mocking the entire night of his trial and subsequent hanging on the cross (from the tongue lashing,

“prophecy son of man, who hit you,” to the purple robe and crown of thorns, to the spitting, to the “Hail, king of the Jews,” to the mocking of the soldiers who said, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself”), to people today like **Madonna** who blasphemously once said, “**Crucifixes are sexy because there is a naked man on them,**” the death of Christ has seen no end of ridicule. Why? No other person in history has been mocked in death like this. It is because **his death did something world-shattering** and everyone knows it.

But what did it do? It is at this point that Christians begin arguing amongst themselves. These are often built on **either-or fallacies**, as if Jesus’ death could only accomplish one thing. (**Example-Martyr Theory**): “**It was a great example for others to emulate as they try to obey God but nothing more,**” many Liberals and Unitarians have said. (**Governmental Theory**): More conservative people have replied that it was something that upheld the **principle of government** in God’s law that sinners need to die. But still, it was not more than that.

The early church held to a variety of views, some focusing on man, while others were more cosmic in scope.

(**Moral Influence Theory**): Though more popular today among Liberals today as they insist this is the only thing Christ's death did, it was quite popular in the early church to say that the death **showed how much God loves the world** and that Christ died in hopes that some would see that love and have their hearts softened and brought to repentance.

(**Ransom Theory**): Augustine and others said that Christ's death was **a ransom payment**, and most taught that the ransom was paid to Satan who held sinners as prisoners of war.

(**Christus Victor**): A related view focuses on **Christ as a victor over Satan**, so that in his death Christ is now able to liberate those who have fear of death.

(**Recapitulation Theory**): Irenaeus taught that Christ went through **all of the phases of Adam's life** and experience, even unto death, in order that he might succeed where Adam failed.

(**Commercial Theory**): A medieval theory taught that Christ's death was a **commercial satisfaction**, which restored God's robbed honor when we sinned. Rather than punish sinners as they deserved, God chose to atone by the death of Christ, thereby restoring his honor and passing the reward on to sinners.

(**Penal Substitution Theory**): And of course, the main view of the Reformed and Evangelicals is that

Christ's death **was a substitution**—one man Jesus dies in the place of many, so that as he takes their punishment, they can have his righteousness credited to them.

This last one especially has brought about yet **another argument**, again almost always in our day put in terms of **an either-or**, because the death of Christ must only be thought of in one sense, not many. If it was a substitution, then *for whom* was it a substitution? Some, emphasizing **God's love**, say that he died for everyone in the same way and now leaves it open to their neutral or even good freewill to choose if they will accept this love or not. Others, wanting to point out **the power and justice** of Christ's death, say that Christ died only for a specific group of people, and that death actually saves them, because no one will willingly choose Christ for the same reason that a robber does not choose the police.

So, yes, Christ's death is one seriously controversial subject. But again I ask why? They reason, as I have said, is because **no other person's death reaches into the very heart of the broken world and shakes it at its core**. Christ's death, unlike all others, has implications that no man dare ignore. Christ's death is powerful, vital, and world changing,

whether an individual chooses to ignore it or not. As the climax of Hebrew's discussion of Christ as better than angels, it raises the issue of Christ's death. As we think about what it says, we have to remember how this discussion arises.

Christ Who Died

Christ is greater than angels for many reasons (especially the fact that he created them; **Heb 1:2; 2:10**), but the climactic reason in Hebrews is because he is “**crowned with glory and honor**” (**2:7, 9**). He is crowned with glory and honor, “**Because of the suffering of death**” (**2:9**). The reason he is able to die is because he became a human being, a man (**2:6-8**). So Christ's death is ultimately what gives him, as a man, the exalted position that he has over heaven and earth. That's pretty world-shattering.

This whole line of thinking originates in **Psalm 8**. “**What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?**” David is not contemplating a particular kind of man. He is contemplating the whole race of human beings of which he is one example. **Jesus shares this humanity, not**

with some of us, but with all of us. He became a man. He was subjected to that which is common to all human beings. And as I said last week, there might be no more offensive teaching in the NT to an ancient person than saying that the Creator of the universe became a man.

It is out of this contemplation of man that the following subject of Christ's death arises. And again, why does it arise? It is because in suffering death, Jesus who has been made a little lower than angels (made in the sense that the eternal Word became flesh), has been crowned with glory and honor. It is a strange, almost unbelievable paradox. Glory comes through suffering? Honor comes through death? Yes, and it had to be this way, not only for himself, but for us if we are to have any hope of escaping punishment for our own sins.

Tasting Death for Everyone

And so it says that Jesus was crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death “so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9). This is a difficult phrase that has given rise to many different

interpretations throughout church history.¹ In the post-Reformation era, one argument has been over: **What does it mean that he tasted death for “everyone?”** Believe it or not, most of the Reformers were basically silent on this question. Calvin didn’t even talk about it. Luther, through a quote of Chrysostom, may hold the opinion that it refers to all human beings without exception,² though it isn’t certain what he means in regard to this question. Frankly, it seems that they just didn’t care about some of the questions we care to ask.

¹ Two good discussions are **Philip Edgcumbe Hughes**, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 94-97; **Lee Gatiss**, “Grace Tasted Death for All: Thomas Aquinas on Hebrews 2:9,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 63.2 [2012]: 217-36. **Going Deeper:** One of the problems is that a corruption in the text was introduced at some point (though no major English translation takes it for its reading). The word “grace” of God (*chariti theou*) was changed to “apart from” God (*choris theou*). No one knows how the corruption got there, though some Fathers (Oecumenius in the sixth century, and Theophylact later on [1050-1108], see Hughes, 95) suggested that the **Nestorians** in the fifth century put it there to fit their own particular teaching. The idea seems to be that the Nestorians who were zealous to divide the human and divine natures of Christ were trying to guard his deity from having suffered on the cross (i.e. he suffered “apart from God” or “apart from his divine nature,” though that is a very strange way to read “of God”), and when you have a theological hobby horse and you are a scribe, it is sometimes easy to read letters of words that aren’t there in favor of a word that you particularly like. Many orthodox Fathers said that Christ in his deity did not die, because how can God die. It is one thing to say this, it is another thing to alter the text in order to make it fit your theology and to feel the need at every turn to split the two natures of Christ from his single person as the Nestorians did. Again, see Hughes (above).

² Citing Chrysostom (of whom it is doubtful that he cares about the question either) says, “... because all men feared death—the Lord, persuading them to approach death confidently, also tasted death Himself.” See Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 29 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 131.

But with the later Arminian controversies, some Calvinists took up the banner to prove that “everyone” means something like “the whole, that is, for the whole body, the church ... every one of the sons ... every one of the bretheren ... every one of the members of the church ... every one of the children of God.”³ As we will see, the context after this phrase certainly narrows down the scope of people, so it is possible to have this as the meaning here (so that “everyone” is not more broad than what comes later, but refers to the same group consistently).⁴ But it should be pointed out that other Calvinists such as Paul Hobson (d. 1666) who helped write the London Baptist Confessions of 1644 and 46 took it universally as referring to all people.⁵

³ See John Gill, “The Cause of God and Truth,” in *The Baptist Faith Series Vol. II* (London: W.H. Collinridge, 1855, republished by the Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1992), 54.

⁴ Gattis, who is pretty moderate for a Calvinist on this question generally speaking, nevertheless takes the same basic position as Gill on this particular passage saying, “For whom precisely did Christ die? Hebrews seems clear elsewhere that through his suffering, Christ became ‘the source of salvation’ not to all without exception but ‘to all those who obey him’ (Hebrews 5:9). Through the priestly offering of himself, he has ‘perfected forever’ not every single individual but ‘the ones who are being sanctified’ (Hebrews 10:14). So it seems likely that in Hebrews 2:9 the writer means to convey that Jesus tastes death for those who keep his word, so that they need never taste it themselves (cf. John 8:52).” Gattis, 226. See also John Piper’s sermon, “For Whom Did Jesus Taste Death,” (May 26, 1997), <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/for-whom-did-jesus-taste-death>, last accessed Dec 1, 2015.

⁵ “So now to my Affirmation, which is, that Christ died for every man, but not for all alike. First, that he died for every man, for the proof of that see 1 *Tim.* 4.10. he is the Saviour of every man, but especially, so there is a common salvation by Christ intended to all. This truth is also made good in 2 *Pet* 2.1, where he declares some men to be men of destruction, and tells them that they had denied the Lord that bought them; so that wicked men and men of destruction were

As for me, I tend to think that Hobson is probably right, though I'm not firm on this. I have several reasons. First, this argument originates in the context of Psalm 8 and humanity, not some special segment of humanity like the elect. Psalm 8 isn't talking about the elect, it is talking about humanity. Second, "tasting death" is not the same thing as "saving" someone. To me, this is actually where I have come to see that simplified TULIP theology, while a helpful shorthand in some respects, is unable to handle the rich nuances of the death of Christ.

comprehended in the purchase of Christ, further see *Heb 2.9.*" Paul Hobson, *Fourteen Queries and Ten Absurdities About the Extent of Christ's Death, the Power of the Creatures, the Justice of God in Condemning Some, and Saving Others, Presented by a Free-willer to the Church of Christ at Newcastle, and Answered by Paul Hobson a Member of Said Church* (London: Printed by Henry Hills for William Hutchison Book-seller in Durham, 1655), 6. For Hobson and some other Calvinists who have taken it this way see the collection of quotes by Tony Byrne on Hebrews 2:9, *Theological Meditations Blogspot*, <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/search/label/Heb.%202%3A9>, last accessed Dec 1, 2015. Thomas Lamb (one short biography calls him, "An English Baptist minister and strict Calvinist, [who] flourished in the second half of the 17th century. He died about 1672. He is noted as the opponent of John Goodwin, the bold defender of Arminianism..." [McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia]) writes, "The truth of the Gospel, which holds forth Christ's giving himself a ransom for all men, 1 Tim 2.6. A propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2. 2. and that he tasted death for every man Heb 2.9. (which is such a glorious truth, as without which first the Gospel of Gods free grace cannot be preached to all men, secondly neither can wicked men nor unbelievers be required to believe; and thirdly neither can the not believing in Christ be concluded to be a sin) ..." Thomas Lamb's initial words "To the Impartial Reader," in *A Treatise of Particular Predestination*(London, 1642), i-ii.

When I was becoming a Calvinist, my big issue was always **predestination**. Who chooses whom in salvation, or perhaps better, who chooses first and what does that initial choice do? The atonement question wasn't even on my radar. I came to believe in *limited atonement* because there is a very important truth in it. Christ's death does something. It is the basis upon which people are saved. Without it, there is no salvation. We are **justified by his blood** (**Rom 5:9**). We were **reconciled to God through the death of His Son** (**Rom 5:10**). And so on. The Arminianism I grew up with just didn't emphasize that, it emphasized me and my will and my choice.

But then I read Calvinists like **Charles Hodge**, **William Shedd**, **R.L. Dabney**, **J.P. Boyce**, and even **Jonathan Edwards**. Hodge said, "**For Augustinians, what one believes about election does not affect the nature of the atonement.**"⁶ They are related, but separate issues. What I came to see is that the atonement is not an either/or, but a both/and. Christ death can do something objectively (towards the demands of the law) and subjectively (towards a person) at

⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 2, 558.

the same time even though those two things are different and not the same thing. What do I mean?

Boyce, the great Reformed Southern Baptist of the 19th century, said that while for the elect he made an actual atonement by which they were actually reconciled to God, “Christ at the same time and in the same work, wrought out a means of reconciliation for all men, which removed every legal obstacle to their salvation, upon their acceptance of the same conditions upon which the salvation is given to the elect.”⁷ What does it mean “legal obstacles?” Let’s think about Adam and sin for a moment. **What do all people deserve for their sins? Death.** What did Christ do on the cross? **He died.** Do you see the one to one there with regard to the law? In other words, the legal obstacle of death which all men deserve has now been satisfied in the death of Christ. No one need now die if they will simply trust in Jesus Christ to save them from their sins. The laws demands have been fulfilled ... for everyone. This relates to the law. He doesn’t fulfill the laws demands only for some people, because the law’s demands are no different for you than your neighbor

⁷ James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 340.

with regard to this. Why? Because you are both humans, you have both sinned, and you both deserve death. Jesus' death satisfies the law's demands of justice. Justice has been met in the death of Christ. And for it, he has been exalted as the Highest Man, the Last Adam, crowned with glory and honor.

Finally, as I see it, the death of Christ—while saving people—does not save them *ipso facto*. This is a terribly important point. *Ipsa facto* is the way our old theologians spoke about a thing being done “by the very fact.” Jesus' death, by the very fact of the death apart from nothing else, does not release anyone, not even the elect from their sins. You and I were both born dead in our sins, even though Christ died for us. So while we are justified by his blood, no one in this room is justified *at the time that Christ shed his blood*. Rather, we are justified *by faith in Christ* through the blood of Christ which then covers our sins, as we will see later in Hebrews. Both Arminians and some Calvinists merge Christ's objective death which satisfies the laws demands with the subjective application of that death to individuals as they create the either/or fallacy of the false dilemma. But

they are not the same, which is Hodge's point about predestination and the atonement.⁸

Human Will and the Atonement

I want us to think more about Hodge's point now. I want to raise a question which takes us into the rest to the chapter. *Why is it that one person for whom Christ "tasted death" will repent while the person right next to him for whom Christ tasted death will not repent?* This question now moves us from the objective work of Christ's death satisfying the law's demands to the subjective work of Christ's death as it is applied to a person. The objective work deals with something outside of you while the subjective work deals with you personally.

The answer is not that Christ's death is only sufficient for one of them, but not the other. No, the death of Christ is sufficient for anyone who will believe it is for them. **But**

⁸ One can adhere to strict limited atonement and separate them in time as someone like John Murray does in *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Historically speaking, both Murray and Hodge would both be considered Reformed and orthodox, as the pale of *Reformed* theology has always been large enough to include both views, though sadly, this is not well understood by most Calvinists in our own day.

why will one believe and not another? This is the question that most Evangelicals, because of the incipient Pelagianism running amuck in our day, answer unbiblically. Look at what Hebrews says and how it now (in my opinion) changes from the general to the specific. “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb 2:10).

Who are these “many sons?” Everyone in the world? No. They are his “brothers” (11). They are the *ekklesia* (“congregation” or “church;” 12). These are the words that some (like John Gill above) rightly latch onto in the text. They are particular words that specific a particular people. But still, the question has not been answered. Why will one person believe and another will not?

The answer given by most people today is that both are inherently neutral people. In fact, many go farther than this saying that both are inherently good people. These good or neutral people both hear the facts about Christ and the Gospel through unbiased, unfiltered ears. For some reason, one person doesn’t like that news, but for another, he does like it. But the reason he likes it is because he is capable of

liking it all by his lonesome, unbiased, basically-good self. He was not made to like it. He did not hear it as a person already hostile to God because of his sin. He was capable and able to like it all by himself. Thus, he chooses to become a brother of Christ on this basis. Christ holds out his hands to everyone, and some from their own goodness choose to respond positively. The moral example of Christ's death has worked! Man has chosen God.

But this is not at all what Hebrews says. How do they become brothers? “Behold, I and the children God has given me” (13). And this is a quote from the OT! God gives Jesus brothers. God does that, not man. God. This refers to God's choice in election. Jesus talks about this all the time, as does the rest of the NT, and in fact, the entire Bible. God chose Abram out of a family of idol worshipers, none of whom were seeking him. God chose Isaac over Ishmael, even though Ishmael was older. God chose Jacob over Esau, even though Esau was older and a much nicer person! God chose the nation of Israel to be his treasured possession, and he did so before Israel even existed to be able to choose him themselves. The Father gave the Son an inheritance of people (Deut 32:9; Ps 33:12). The Father gives Jesus a

people and “all that the Father gives me will come to me” (John 6:37).

So the idea of Hebrews 2 is that while Christ’s death satisfies the demands of the law for everyone, thereby removing all of the legal obstacles for anyone, God also must remove the moral obstacles—that is the hatred towards himself that all men have because of their sin. This he does for a special people and he does it out of grace alone. It isn’t because they deserve it more than others, but because God is simply pleased to save some out of the whole of humanity which is wicked and in rebellion against him, even though they don’t deserve it. Even we were his enemies. Even we were dead in our sins. This multi-intentioned view of Christ’s death is summarized in other passages this way: Many are called, but few are chosen (Matt 22:14). Or he is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Tim 4:10). Or, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Or even John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.” Out of the whole, God chooses a few. Not because it is fair. Hell is what is

fair—for everyone. But because it is kind, it is merciful, it is gracious, and it glorifies the God-man who did a work for them. Now, if this is true, what kind of hearts should we have towards others, friends? Should we act like Christian elites because we have all knowledge while others remain in darkness? Did you come to this knowledge yourself? Should we not be filled with love and kindness and patience for all people, acting as our Lord has with us with regard to the truth of his word, knowing that all we have is but a gift from heaven?

Before concluding this part, let's look at how the rest of the passage continues helping us answer the question. “**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same thing**” (Heb 2:14). It is “the children,” not all the offspring of Adam, but the spiritual offspring of Christ. Now, all the offspring of Adam do, of course, share in flesh and blood. But while that is true, the emphasis is on *the children*. Christ partook of that nature that **we all** share together, elect and non-elect alike, and this again reaches back to tasting death for everyone. **But** it is “the children” for whom he did this especially, those he had been given by God, those he would actually save.

Again, he came to “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (15). Now, it is again true that all men fear death. It isn’t just the elect who fear it. All men do. It is also true, as we will see shortly, that all men were subject to slavery. So Christ’s death is sufficient to release any. However, he came with the special purpose of “help[ing] the offspring of Abraham” (16). Using “Abraham” here rather than something like “Adam” or even “Noah” is deliberate. It focuses our minds on the effectual, salvific intent of Christ to save a particular group of people. Abraham is not shorthand for all people, but for Israel.

“Offspring of Abraham,” has a two-fold meaning in the Scripture. It can refer to biological Jews (Rom 9:1-5). If as we said the first week, Luke is writing to a group of former Jewish priests, this would be an especially meaningful way of putting it to them. Jesus did not leave all of biological children of Abraham to their sins, even though they as priests were especially guilty of killing him. But “offspring of Abraham” also refers to those who have faith in Christ. Luke traveled with Paul extensively, and would have been very familiar with the theology of Romans and Galatians. “Not all are children of Abraham because they are his

offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring” (Rom 9:7-8). This begins that glorious chapter in Romans on God’s electing love for those who did not earn it or choose it, but were granted it by grace alone.

Again in Hebrews 2, “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect” (vs. 17). Again, yes, he is made like all the descendants of Adam in every respect (except without sin). He partakes of all of our humanity. This is the general aspect of his coming. Yet again it narrows the focus, “So that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (17). Here, “people” does not refer to everyone in the world (as I think propitiation does refer to in 1 John 2:2). “The people” is an OT way of talking about the inheritance of the Son: The children of Israel, the people of God (Ex 30:16; 32:30; Lev 9:7; Deut 21:8; etc.).

The idea isn’t in mind to deny that Christ’s death has some purpose towards those who are not Christ’s people. The idea is to emphasize that his work is especially,

salvifically for his people. Jesus, you see, and the Father and the Spirit, simply **will not leave salvation open to everyone's freewill**. And thank God! For if he did that, no one would be saved, for no one seeks God, no one chooses him. But Jesus' work is intended in manifold ways to work in the hearts of the elect by the Holy Spirit to effectually bring them to Christ. Do you see why he is glorified and honored above men and angels? This whole thing, this salvation we are talking about, is ultimately for **the glory of God alone**. Yes, in his kindness and grace, we benefit by being saved, and even by being glorified with Christ. We share in his glory. But it is His glory, not ours, for he is the Glory of God and to him and for him belong all the glory.

Atonement Theories Revisited

So let us now return to these more general theories of atonement as we conclude. I have mentioned many of them: **The Example-Martyr Theory**, the **Governmental Theory**, the **Moral Influence Theory**, the **Ransom Theory**, *Christus Victor*, the **Recapitulation Theory**, the **Commercial Theory**, and the **Penal Substitution theory**. I would say that each of

these theories contains something of the truth, but a couple of them contain elements are really very essential for you to understand. When a supporting of any single theory says, “This is the only theory you need, all others are lies,” then you have some very big problems. And sadly, many of these are presented just this way, especially by people who want to deny the essential components that actually bring people to salvation. With this in mind, consider the words of Dabney, “Each of the false schemes [false because they try to usurp all other views] attempts to express what is true. But ours [the Reformed] really includes all that theirs claim, while it embraces the vital element which they omit, vicarious penal satisfaction.”⁹

Christ’s death really is a moral example. God did this to “demonstrate his justice” (Rom 3:25-26) and his “love for us” (Rom 5:8). And this moral example is used, I believe, in the means of salvation, to persuade and woo his elect to himself. But you see, a moral example all by itself would persuade no one. This is why in any place in Scripture where

⁹ R. L. Dabney, *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*, Second Edition. (St. Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1878), 510.

you see the death of Christ as a moral example, you see it as more than that.

Christ's death **satisfies the demands of the law** like a governmental theory will want to show. In fact, I believe Hebrews has this in the back of its mind. But again, in any place you see that objective and universal work of Christ discussed in relation to the law and the world, you also necessarily see it as more than that. Because an objective work alone is not enough to save people, not because the work is insufficient with relation to justice, but because people hate God and will not turn to him because they have a serious moral problem with him.

Without question, Jesus' death is **a recapitulation** of the phases of Adam's life. Jesus is, in fact, the Second or Last Adam. In terms of glorifying Christ and raising him up, in terms of focusing on the Lord Jesus, this is a very important aspect of the atonement to consider. But it only begins to move us towards what you and I need, which is salvation. Christ became the son of man **“so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone”** so that he could bring **many sons and brothers in the church to glory.**

Two of the theories find prominence in Hebrews 2 above the others. One is implicit, the other is explicit. The explicit is *Christus Victor*. This theory deals with **Christ's victory over Satan** who held people in captivity and slavery to sin and death. Hebrews says, "... he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham" (**Heb 2:14-16**).

During most of the last few centuries, *Christus Victor* was a view that had fallen on hard times. Many people even forgot it (though not in the Eastern Church), though it may in fact be the most prominent view of the atonement in the combined writings of the Early Church. Then, in 1931 a Swedish **Gustaf Aulén** (1879 – 1977) wrote a book called "*Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* [in the Early Church]. This book put the view back on the radar, and it has become quite popular in many segments of Evangelicalism. Sadly, and quite

unnecessarily, it is being used by some to dismiss some very essential parts of the atonement that I spoke about earlier.¹⁰

I never used to have the theological superstructure that could really make sense of this view. But then I discovered the whole **divine council** worldview, and suddenly I understood why this was such an emphasized point in the early church. Satan was given two things after the fall of Adam. He was given **the power of death**, as Hebrews says. And he was given **rule of the nations of men**, as Deuteronomy (and Hebrews) says. Evil, fallen angels (which Hebrews has been talking about) were given rule of the nations. These beings increasingly held men under a tyrannical thumb of unjust laws, corrupt morals, and demonic influences (**Ps 82**). This is why it can speak of people being in lifelong slavery to sin and death.

But Christ's death did something to this whole state of affairs. Listen to how the governmental and *Christus Victor* are woven together in Colossians 2, "**And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,**

¹⁰ See Mark Galli, "The Problem with Christus Victor," *Christianity Today* (April 7, 2001), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/aprilweb-only/christusvicarious.html?start=1>, last accessed Dec 1, 2015.

God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:13-15).

How did this happen? Hebrews has already explained it. In becoming man, Jesus took up the work of Adam anew. Adam was given dominion over the earth. Man was made lower than the angels, but he would be given glory and honor above them, if he should “pass the test” in the Garden with the Serpent. If he were to faithfully speak as a prophet God’s law and truth, and act as a priest guarding and serving the holy temple and casting out the unclean thing, then he would rise to king where he would rule over even the heavenly beings. This is what Jesus did, but it took going to the cross to faithfully carry out that work as prophet, priest, and king. Because he did so, he has conquered in accordance with the original promises given to Adam and found in Psalm 8. He is *Christus Victor*: Christ the Victor over sin, death, and the devil. Therefore, if he decides to deliver someone, no one can hold back his hand or say to him,

“What have you done?” Not even a demon or fallen angel who hold such powerful positions of authority over the lives of non-believers. This is why the gospel is so vital, because it is through this message of the gospel that the power of God frees slaves once held in captivity. Only the Gospel does this.

The reason Hebrews is focused on Christ the victor over Satan is because without this aspect of his work, there would be **no legal means** of conquering sin and death, and Satan would still have the legal hold over the nations that he was given in primordial days. So *Christus Victor* sets the stage for Christ to be able to save us from those things “out there.” But the problem is, we also need to be saved from things “in here,” things inside of us—our own sin, rebellion, and enmity and hatred of God.

It is at this point that the implicit idea of Christ’s death as a penal substitution comes into consideration. A penal substitution is **a legal action of Christ whereby his action can become a substitute for another**. Thus, it is sometimes called the **Substitutionary Theory** or a **Vicarious Theory** of the atonement. Christ dies in the place of someone else. We may see this in the word “for” in **Hebrews 2:9**, “... that he might

taste death for everyone.” David Allen says that this word indicates that the atonement was substitutionary in nature.¹¹

The substitutionary view of the atonement was not really developed until the middle ages, though in a way, we can call *Christus Victor* a form of substitutionary atonement. But in what I’m talking about now, the focus is really on what Christ did specifically for us. In becoming a man, in dying for sin, in offering himself as a sacrifice, he made atonement for us as humans. We see this substitutionary idea in many places, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Christ takes our sin, we get his righteousness. It is a substitutionary idea. “Christ also

¹¹ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 211–212. He cites M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 2:814 and Robertson, *GGNT* 630–31 at this point. **Going Deeper:** We do not have time to get into the differences between a penal substitution and a pecuniary substitution. As Dabney says, the latter, which is a commercial transaction would free the substitute who owes the debt *ipso facto* (see above) and there is nothing that Justice can add to it. This is most common way that Calvinists talk about the atonement today. A penal substitution is not a commercial transaction (where a monetary payment is given for debt). It is a substitutional act that the Judge counts as a worthy act which will satisfy the demands of Justice. It can have conditions attached to it such as “you have to believe by faith in the Son,” whereas a pecuniary or commercial payment can’t have any conditions. What I mean is, if I owe a restaurant \$100 for a fancy meal that I just ate, they can’t demand that I pay them \$100 and put some further condition upon upon me leaving their fine establishment (such as, you also have to do the dishes). The payment is made, that’s all they can demand. Dabney is very helpful here, as is Shedd.

died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

The vital point here is that Christ **as a man** has done for men what no other man could do. He has obeyed God even unto death. More, as we will see later in Hebrews, he has offered a perfect sacrifice as a high priest, which takes away sins. Still even more, **as God**, he is able to “propitiate” or appease the wrath of the Almighty, so that sins can be forgiven and justice upheld. All of this is about bringing anyone who trusts in Christ to salvation.

But a couple more points are added about his death. By his death as a man, **he is made perfect through suffering** (10). “Made perfect” speaks about his being confirmed eternally as perfect, since he was always perfect. This speaks about Christ as a man. His faithfulness unto death made him finally and forever perfect. Until that time he was under probation just like Adam. Would he or would he not go through with it? (This is a question only from our human perspective).

Second, **He sanctifies those who are being sanctified** (11). To be sanctified here is certainly related to salvation. But it refers specifically to being **set apart as holy**. Because Jesus was made perfect through suffering, he can sanctify his

brothers and bring them to final perfection on the Last Day. Of course, a big way he does this is through our own suffering, which is not something we want to hear. But to be counted to suffer like Christ suffered, for the Father, is a glory and honor that only those who undergo it can understand. Are you willing to suffer for Christ? That question may become more and more pertinent in coming days. We may all have to answer it, whether we want to or not.

Finally, and importantly, the chapter concludes with a very practical element about temptation. This is not all about the future. It is not pure pie in the sky. But “**Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted**” (Heb 2:18). The practical implications of this know no boundaries. **We will consider them in the context of the next two chapters** as we continue our study next time.

For today, it is enough to know that Christ has died for sinners. He became a man, was subject to all of our infirmaries, was counted as a sinner, died as a substitute, defeated sin, death, and the devil, upheld the law of God, was made an example to the whole world. He did all of this

and more. His death has truly done more things than what you or I can ever conceive. Men scoff at it. Men ignore it. Men fight over it. Because it is that important.

Have you trusted that Christ died for you, and in doing so has promised to bring many sons to glory? Have you understood that he is able to help you when tempted? Have you called upon him in humble worship to save and to sanctify you?