

The History of the Doctrine of Justification...



How
Christ
preserved
the good
news in
history

The Work of Christ Anselm: The Doctrine of Satisfaction

We are continuing to look at the two great anchors that have kept the church safely secured to the biblical concept of justification. Those great anchors can be summarized in two questions:

1. Who was Christ?
2. What did Christ accomplish on behalf of His people?

In our previous studies, we have looking at how the church struggled with the biblical understanding of who Christ was and what His atoning work accomplished. In doing so, we have examined some of the great debates of early church history. We have done so because without a proper understanding of Who Christ was, His atoning work has absolutely no application for us. On the other hand, if we fail to understand what He accomplished by going to the cross, the question of His identity is irrelevant.

The way we tried to focus our study was by looking at some of the great fights of church history. We have looked for instance at how Athanasius battled with Arius and how the church in struggling to come to a biblical understanding of Christ's divine nature hammered out the principles of their faith at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD by producing the great Nicene Creed.

We have also seen how in finally coming to a proper understanding of Christ's deity, the church was forced then to deal with developing a biblical understanding of Christ's humanity. We noted how the church was confronted by heresy and how as a result the church somewhat reluctantly forged through the biblical arguments and came up with the great ecumenical statement of faith concerning Christ's two natures, human and divine, at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

We have seen repeatedly how the creation of these great statements of faith came not as a result of curious speculation but generally came much more from a pastoral perspective. The issues for the church always concerned how man could be reconciled to God. Godly pastors and teachers were concerned with being relevant and the major point of relevance concerned how they should instruct their congregations regarding eternal life. Today, the idea of relevance in the pulpit is much more concerned with how justified people can engage the culture. The problem is that without a sufficient understanding of how men and women are justified before a Holy God, modern Christianity is reduced to something quite sinister. It is no longer a question of how justified people can engage the culture; it is rather a question of how people of like socioeconomic and political interests can gain a sense of importance in a dying culture. Put simply, such

Christianity is reduced from being salt and light to being a social club for disenfranchised ditto-heads. I say this as both a justified man and as a disenfranchised ditto-head.

But to repeat myself, initially the church's concerns centered on the Person of Christ. Fortunately, because of their connection to Scriptural authority and their ecumenical nature the great early councils of Christendom laid many of the questions concerning the Person of Christ to rest. That is, of course, the reason why latter battles turned to the second question. And, last week we got a hint of the nature of one of those important struggles. We saw Augustine and Pelagius battle over the relevance of Christ's atoning work. Their battle was not couched in those terms; it was rather couched in terms of the freedom of the will. But the underlying issue, the real issue, concerned what Christ actually accomplished on our behalf in His atoning work. We got a foretaste, a foreshadowing, of some of the great battles yet to come and we got a hint of the nature of those battles.

The Council of Carthage settled, at least officially, the church's battle with Pelagianism and its ugly step-child Semi-Pelagianism in 529 AD. But the battle over understanding what Christ accomplished on behalf of His people has continued to this day. Sometimes the battle has focused on trying to come to an intellectual understanding of what the Bible teaches regarding Christ's atoning work. Sometimes, the battle has been reduced to a conflict between belief and unbelief. But in medieval times, the battles concerned the nature of the atonement. That is why to understand the men that we are going to look at his morning, you must have at least an introductory understanding of the dominant

view of the atonement in medieval times. That view was called the Ransom to Satan theory.

The Ransom to Satan Theory stated that God paid a ransom to Satan in the atonement of Christ. Early Christian writers had come up against the word "ransom" in both the gospels and the epistles.

^{NIV} **Mark 10:45**...For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^{NIV} **1 Timothy 2:5**...For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all men-- the testimony given in its proper time. ⁷ And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle-- I am telling the truth, I am not lying-- and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

Coming up against this word "ransom", they recognized that the term itself implied three things. First, that a ransom needed to be paid. Secondly, that someone needed to pay the ransom. And thirdly, that someone received the ransom. They focused on this third notion that someone needed to receive the ransom and began to try to identify who that was. It seems they could have gotten the answer from the Timothy passage and the idea of Christ as Mediator, but instead they came to the conclusion that Christ's death paid a ransom to Satan.

The logic went something like this:

1. The devil had obtained rights over fallen humanity which God was obliged to respect.

2. The only way God could obtain the release of mankind from the power of Satan was if Satan overstepped his authority.
3. If a sinless person entered the world and came under the unjust claims of Satan, Satan would have overstepped his authority and would have to give up his claims on mankind.
4. Gregory the Great even argued that God had tricked Satan. Satan had thought Christ was regular man and when Satan killed the innocent Christ on the cross, he doomed himself and his rule over mankind.
5. After the crucifixion, Christ descended into hell, broke down its gates and set the captive spirits free (I Peter 3:18). This became known as the "Harrowing of Hell".

Now in the medieval world, this metaphor reigned supreme. There was a preoccupation with the idea that Satan could be tricked or duped. It seems that the medieval world had the same affection for kind hearted con-men that we have today. It's just that they viewed God Himself as a lovable con-artist. Obviously, they had a very weak and non-biblical view of God's holiness.

In recent times, this view has enjoyed a resuscitation in the evangelical church. However, a modified form of the view has been existent in the Eastern Orthodox Church since the middle ages. The form existent in the Eastern Orthodox Church has been stripped of all the objectionable elements, like God using deception. And there is a sense, certainly, in which God triumphed over Satan in the atoning work of Christ. Yet, the idea of Christ's atoning work as a victory over Satan does not seem to be the dominant metaphor used in the Bible.

The dominant metaphor used to speak of Christ's atoning work was one of legal satisfaction. This idea was developed most clearly by Anselm the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Anselm was born in Italy in 1033 AD. He later moved to France and gained a formidable reputation as a monastic teacher in Normandy. After the successful Norman invasion by Harold of Hastings in 1066 AD, Anselm was asked to move to England, where he became the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093 AD. He was an active churchman and prolific writer. He wrote one important book named Proslogian in which he developed the ontological argument as a proof for the existence of God. It was there that he used one of his most famous lines, “I believe that I may understand”. But let me give you the whole context.

I do not attempt, Lord, to penetrate Thy depth, for by no means do I compare my intellect with it; but I desire to understand, to a degree, Thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand.¹

But his most famous book, one of the 10 great Christian books of all times, was Cur Deus Homo? – Why the God-Man? In Cur Deus Homo, Anselm developed his understanding of the biblical doctrine of satisfaction. I want to be clear about his, he did not invent the doctrine. He rediscovered and developed his understanding of it by making logical conclusions based upon what the Bible taught. His understanding of Christ’s death as one that makes satisfaction for our sins came first from the text and secondly from his objection to the idea of God being deceptive and tricking Satan as set forth in the medieval concept of the Ransom to Satan. His argument for what has become known as the Satisfaction Theory goes like this:

1. Man was created in a state of original goodness.
2. God required man to live righteously. This was man’s duty.
3. Man sinned and fell in Adam.
4. God’s honor must be satisfied.

5. This can be done by paying God His due or by punishment.
6. Man ought to make satisfaction for his sin but cannot.
7. God could make satisfaction for sin.
8. Since man ought and only God can make satisfaction for sin, satisfaction must be made by the God-man.
9. Therefore, the incarnation is required.

Anselm's idea that Christ made satisfaction for the sins of men has met with two different reactions. One reaction has been deep, abiding love and gratitude and the other has been with hisses and laughter. Listen to some quotes:

If anyone Christian work outside of the canon of the New Testament can be described as epoch-making, it is *Cur Deus Homo?*²

Cur Deus Homo? is the truest and greatest book on the atonement that has ever been written.³

There are so many defects that this theory is entirely untenable.⁴

Now, there are defects in Anselm's theory, but they are for the time in which they were expressed negligible. It is true he tended to rationalism and it is true that he uses too little Scripture. Now it is not as if there was no biblical basis to Anselm's ideas. There were plenty.

^{NIV} **1 Peter 2:24**...He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 5:21**...God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{NIV} Romans 3:24...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his

forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

^{NIV} **1 John 4:10**...This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

In these last two verses in particular, the Scripture focuses on the idea of “propitiation”, that is the turning aside of God’s wrath. That is true even though the NIV doesn’t use the word. The word is there in Greek and Anselm related particularly to this notion, the satisfaction of God’s justice and the appeasement of His anger. But sometimes Anselm chases theological rabbits. One example is that he expended a lot of words to argue that the reason God decided to redeem man was in order to replace the number of angels that fell with Satan. But, in spite of that, Anselm helped to get the church back on track. The Reformers, particularly Luther and Calvin, would later take Anselm’s basic propositions and flesh them out biblically. They would take Anselm’s notion of satisfaction and develop it biblically along the lines of God’s justice. For Anselm, it was an issue of honor, for the Reformers it became an issue of God’s justice. But in either case they harkened back to Anselm’s great quote made to an imaginary objector in *Cur Deus Homo?*: “You have not yet considered how great your sin is.”

Listen to Horton:

As the eleventh-century theologian Anselm expressed it, our Savior had to be God in order to pay an infinite debt and conquer sin and death. But he had to be Man, since it was humanity, after all, that had merited divine wrath through original and personal sin. So already we see that a high view of the work of Christ requires and rests upon a high view of the person of Christ.⁵

Remarkably, Anselm's greatest opponent was one of his students, a man by the name of Peter Abelard. Abelard is a tragic figure. He was a man of gigantic intellect and he was considered to one of the foremost theologians of his day. But he was a lusty man. He loved women and women loved him, that is, until he met the young and beautiful Heloise. Abelard was forty and Heloise was eighteen. He was smitten by her beauty, her exceedingly white teeth and her sharp mind. Heloise was equally overwhelmed by the renowned Abelard. They had an illicit love affair. Eventually Abelard married Heloise in secrecy. They lived apart, Abelard was still living in a monastery. Eventually, Heloise's uncle found out about the secret marriage and was outraged that a theological instructor had taken advantage of his niece. He had Abelard apprehended by a gang of thugs and on his order they beat him and more importantly they emasculated him. Needless to say, that for all practical purposes ended the marriage. Heloise moved into a monastery, herself, and during the next ten years they wrote each other some of the most moving and most pathetic love letters ever exchanged between a husband and wife. Eventually, however, Abelard grew less affectionate toward Heloise even writing her that his mutilation had been God's vehicle to propel him forward in his spiritual growth.

It was in that mode of spiritual advancement that he turned upon his old teacher Anselm. He mocked Anselm's statement that Christians "believe in order to understand". Abelard believed in an extremely rationalistic approach to Christianity. Later he renounced Anselm's view of satisfaction. He argued that the cross was not primarily an instrument of atonement. He argued that God was not petty, like mankind, in that He had to be propitiated. He argued that the cross was really given to mankind in order to demonstrate God's love and that as

a result it God's chief instrument to spur men in their love of God. His view of the atonement later became known as the "moral influence" theory. Listen to this quote:

Everyone is made more righteous, that is more loving toward God, after the passion of Christ than before, because people are incited to love ... And so our redemption is that great love for us shown in the passion of Christ, which not only sets us free from the bondage of sin, but also gains for us the true liberty of the children of God, so that we should fulfill all things not so much through fear as through love.⁶

Let me note two or three observations to the conclusions Abelard draws. First, not everyone was made more loving toward God after the crucifixion that before. Apparently, some are and were hardened in their sins more than ever. Secondly, our redemption is not the great love shown for us in the passion of Christ; the great love shown for us is the sacrificial atonement Christ made in our behalf.

I am making here a crucial distinction. The love of God is not based upon just the visual impact that the cross provided. It is rather based upon the action the cross accomplished. It is not primarily about how it makes it us feel; it is primarily about how it rescued us from God's righteous anger. It is this crucial difference. If, I am being rushed along in the torrent of the Niagara River towards its deadly falls and you see me and wish to demonstrate your love for me and yell out, "Look at this demonstration of how much I love you!" and jump in and we both go over the falls, what good is that? But if you yell out, "I'm coming and I will save you!" and you jump in and save me and in doing so give up your own life, that's something altogether different. My reaction to you will be one of love and affection. I will be incited to adore your memory and become your devotee not

because of what you felt but rather because of what you accomplished. The fact that you loved me enough to die for me has meaning, but the fact that you died for me in saving me has real meaning.

That brings me to my third observation regarding Abelard. He was right in that the subjective element regarding love and gratitude toward Christ ought to be emphasized. That was something lacking in Anselm. Anselm was preoccupied with the idea of satisfying God's honor, and in that preoccupation he missed or left out the proper emphasis that Christ's work should have on believers. That was an error that Luther and Calvin would fix some four hundred years in the future. But in the end the cross accomplished something real and objective. It satisfied God's justice and propitiated God's anger toward us. It reconciled us to God when we were oblivious to our condition before God. It is reflecting on that objective act, Christ in our place upon the tree, that will ultimately incite us to the kind of genuine biblical love and gratitude we ought to have. If we are not moved to gratitude, we have not listened carefully enough to the words of Anselm who argued, "You have not yet considered the greatness of your sin."

In the middle ages, Anselm won the day and his victory carried through the Reformation. Christ actually accomplished something on behalf of sinners. In our day, I'm afraid that Abelard has won the day. The Christianity of modern America is primarily a subjective, inward religion of feelings. We feel strongly about Christ because we pity Him or the cruelty He suffered, but we do not love Him because of what He accomplished on our behalf. We do not focus on our sorry state and God's righteous indignation towards us foul sinners. Unconsciously, we have approached the liberalism of the 1920's which argued,

“It doesn’t matter if the resurrection was historical. It doesn’t matter if Christ actually existed. What matters is the Christ-event and the impact it has had upon my heart. It has changed me, even if it never happened in history.” We need to recover the grandeur of what Christ has done in our behalf. When we do, we will be able to say with Spurgeon:

Who stooped to pick thee up, O insect of a day? Who stooped to save thee? Who but he who bears earth's huge pillars up and spreads the heavens abroad? The Son of God omnipotent, eternal, and infinite, has fallen in love with the fallen sons of men, and for them has donned the garment of human flesh, and in that flesh has suffered to the death, and died a most shameful death upon the gibbet of Calvary. Oh tell it everywhere that Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever, has redeemed us! and after that, who will say that we do not belong to him?⁷

¹ Proslogian Chapter 1

² J.K. Mozley

³ James Denney

⁴ Adolph Von Harnack

⁵ Michael Horton

⁶ Abelard

⁷ Spurgeon