

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christ's Saving Work, Session 20, Conclusion, 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Work and the Direction of Christ's Work

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This is Dr. Robert Peterson in his teaching on the saving work of Christ. This is session 20, Conclusion, The 6 Pictures of Christ's Saving Work and the Direction of Christ's Work.

We're drawing our lectures to a conclusion.

We have thought more about Christ's saving events, and now we're summarizing for the final time the six major pictures of his saving work, and we just said the pictures portray the same reality. There are six different ways of showing our needs and God using his son to meet our needs in his saving events, especially his death and resurrection. One more thing to say is that each picture is important.

Before I argue for the predominance of one picture, each picture is important. Every one of the six major pictures is notable. Certainly, scripture contains more than six pictures of Christ's accomplishment.

John McIntyre, in *The Shape of Soteriology*, lists thirteen images. Ransom, redemption, salvation, sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, atonement, reconciliation, victory, punishment/penalty, satisfaction, example, and liberation. Although I am unsure as to the exact number and would combine some items on this list, his point is well taken.

Scripture presents Christ's saving work using more than six themes. What are my criteria for identifying major pictures? Acknowledging help from Henri Blochet, I have four. Number one is appearance across the biblical canon with roots in the Old Testament.

Two, occurrence in a good number of passages. Three, theological significance. And four, recognition in historical theology.

Using these criteria, I conclude that there are six main pictures. My chief point at present is that each of these pictures is important to gain a good understanding of the cross and empty tomb. Thus, it is a mistake to champion one picture by downplaying the import of the others, as we saw that many figures in the history of the doctrine of atonement have done.

To gain a full-orbed appreciation of the work of Christ, we must explore all six pictures. I would cite second Adam New Creation as the most neglected picture of the six in my experience in both academy and church. I hope these lectures contribute to redressing that neglect.

Penal substitution is foundational. Although every picture is valuable, and none is to be ignored, I conclude that penal substitution is foundational to the others. Those who have heard me read papers at the annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society will be surprised at this conclusion.

In those papers, I regarded legal substitution as a biblical theme, but in my efforts to promote all six pictures, I questioned whether any one of them was a master metaphor. I do not like that terminology and will qualify my statement, but I now regard substitution as foundational to a doctrine of Christ's saving work. I am jealous to underscore my last point.

All six pictures are biblical and, therefore, important. It is a mistake to defend one image by minimizing the others, and it is a mistake to ignore any of the images. Nevertheless, after completing the study of Christ's saving events and giving considerable thought to the biblical pictures, I conclude that penal substitution should be regarded as foundational.

I have nine reasons for this stance, which I will spread across four categories. Redemptive history, pictures of Christ's work, prominence, and the Godward direction. Redemptive history.

First, an argument can be made from the flow of redemptive history. Isaiah 53 teaches legal substitution. In verses 5 and 6, 10 to 12, Christopher writes, words are apt.

Jesus' vicarious suffering and death will bear the iniquities of those who, having thought he was suffering under the judgment of God for his own sin, now realize that it was actually our sorrows, transgressions, iniquities, and sins that were laid upon him. The language of sacrificial substitution and of vicarious sin-bearing runs through Isaiah 53 unmistakably. Furthermore, Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 exerts a powerful influence upon the New Testament writers, as we said before.

The second edition of the United Bible Society's Greek New Testament lists 41 New Testament passages in its index of quotations for Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12. I will say that their category for inclusion in the New Testament is the New Testament. Second, though Christ predicts his death and resurrection three times in the first two Gospels, in only one place does he interpret its significance in the ransom saying of Mark 10:45, paralleled with Matthew 20:28. As I argued previously, this saying

teaches both redemption and penal substitution. I, Howard Marshall, interpreting the ransom saying in light of similar sayings in Psalm 49:7 to 9 and Mark 8:37, agree.

Quote: Jesus serves men by giving his life as a ransom to many. Mark, no doubt, intends this saying to be seen against the background of 8:37, where the question is raised whether a man can give any exchange for his life. Behind the question also lies Psalm 49:7 to 9. Quote, truly, no man can ransom himself or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly and can never suffice, that he should continue to live on forever and never see the pit, a reference to death.

What man cannot do, Howard Marshall continues to write, has been done by Christ. We are surely justified in discerning here the thought of human mortality as a result of human sin and in seeing in the death of Christ the ransom price paid to God for the redemption of mankind from death. Third, Hebrews 2:17, propitiation, and 9:23, Christ's blood purifying heaven, constitute an inclusion underscoring substitution.

Hebrews 2:7, where it mentions his death as a priestly propitiation, and Hebrews 9:23, which speaks of his blood purifying heaven, constitute an inclusion teaching substitution. William Lane highlights the substitutionary character of our great priest's self-giving. Quote, the making of propitiation for sins exhibits the primary concern of the high priestly office with the reconciliation of the people to God.

The concept implies sacrifice, and in this context, the propitiatory work of the Son consisted in the laying down of his life for others. Compare chapter 2 verses 10, 14, 18. Hebrews 9:23 teaches the astounding truth that Christ's sacrifice purifies heaven itself.

Once more, listen to Lane. Quote, the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of Christ purified the heavenly sanctuary from a defilement resulting from the sins of the people. The superior sacrifice demanded was provided by the self-oblation of Christ.

Thus, early in Hebrews 2:17 and later 9:23, the author sounds strong substitutionary notes. He intends for us to understand Christ, our high priest, and sacrifice within this substitutionary framework—pictures of Christ's work.

Most of the other pictures of the work of Christ include legal substitution. Fourth, therefore, although redemption is more than substitution, it includes it. We have shown this for the ransom saying, Mark 10:45. We add Galatians 3:13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of law by becoming a curse for us.

Graham Cole brings out the substitutionary force of this text. Quoting Cole in his good book, *God the Peacemaker*, how the atonement brings shalom. God has acted in Christ to address the human predicament at this point.

The divine move is astounding for a great exchange has taken place. As Jeffrey, Ovi, and Sack suggest "it is hard to imagine a plainer statement of the doctrine of penal substitution."

Paul is drawing on the language of the marketplace. A price is paid to set a slave free, and the price of this redemption is unfathomable. Christ redeemed us from the curse of law by becoming a curse for us.

Fifth, penal substitution is the basis for reconciliation. According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. The preceding three verses all mention reconciliation.

Linda Bellville admits that the exact interpretation of God's making Christ sin in verse 21 is difficult but insists that the big idea is clear. Quote, if our debts are not posted to our account, according to verse 19, it is because someone else has legally assumed them much as a scapegoat did on the day of atonement, Leviticus 16, and the guilt offering did on other occasions, Leviticus 4 and 5. This is why God can make overtures of friendship toward those who are otherwise his enemies. That's reconciliation.

If the exact point of made sin, she writes, is lost to us, the thrust is clear. So closely did Christ identify with the plight of humanity that their sin became his sin. Close quote.

Bellville has a commentary on 2 Corinthians in the IVP New Testament commentary series. Sixth, to my surprise, although scripture says much about spiritual warfare and presents the Christus Victor theme in a number of New Testament passages, when it tells how Christus Victor saves, it subordinates it theme to legal substitution. In Colossians 2:14.15 and in Revelation 5:5-9, both of which we have examined.

Graham Cole is right. Christus Victor needs the explanatory power of substitutionary atonement. In Colossians 2:14.15 and 2:14, our bill of indebtedness consisting of the ten commandments to which we signed our devotion and we broke up one side and down the other, the handwritten bill condemning us is nailed to Jesus' cross.

He pays our debt. And then immediately 2:15 says that God in Christ triumphs over the principalities and powers, making a public display over them. That is, it is because there is penal substitution that there is victory.

F.F. Bruce, I didn't say this before, F.F. Bruce suggests the connection between Colossians 2:14.15. When the demons see, as it were, our bill of indebtedness nailed to Jesus' cross, they howl with delight. Now we've got him. He is damned, our enemy.

But God turns the tables on them because our penal substitute is the victor. And his paying the penalty in our place turns the tables on them and they are routed as God meets his own legal demands and thereby strips the principalities and powers of their weapons and of any dignity that they had. Penal substitution is fundamental to Christ as victor.

We see the same thing in Revelation 5:5-9. John sees the lion of the tribe of Judah who has overcome or triumphed, conquered to open the book. He is conquered by his blood, by his violent death. But then John looks again and no longer sees Christ the triumphant king, but Christ the lamb who makes atonement by giving his blood as a ransom to purchase people, to purchase the world, which according to Revelation 5:5-9 means people from every tribe and language and people group and geographical locale.

Seventh, I regard the propitiatory theme of legal substitution as foundational to the others, although I value every one of the six themes. Seventh, sacrifice is strongly colored by substitution. All the following passages dealing with Old Testament background to Christ's sacrifice or his actual sacrifice imply substitution.

Exodus 12:13, Leviticus 16, Isaiah 53:10, Romans 3:25, 8:3, Hebrews 2:17, 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18, and Revelation 5:9. I want to be clear, I am not reducing redemption, reconciliation, Christ as victor, and sacrifice to penal substitution. Rather, I am arguing that when the biblical writers spoke of Christ's atonement, no matter what picture they were using, substitution came readily to mind. It is spread across the other pictures in a manner that suggests it is foundational.

Prominence, eighth, legal substitution is prominent in scripture. Its root sinks deep into Old Testament soil. Exodus 12:13, Leviticus 1:9, 2:1-2, 3:3, and 5:4, 29, and 31, Leviticus 1:9, 2:1-2, 3:3, and 5:4, 29, and 31, Leviticus 16:21, and 22, Isaiah 53:5 and 6, and 12 through 10.

Substitution is prominent in the New Testament. Romans 3:25, 26, Romans 8:1-4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13, Colossians 2:14, Hebrews 2:17, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 3:18, 1 John 2:2, 4:10, and Revelation 5:9. My ninth argument is propitiation constitutes part of the Godward direction of the work of Christ. Ninth, penal substitution is the most important aspect of the most profound direction of Jesus' death and resurrection, as I argue next.

Directions of Christ's saving work. We have dealt much with Jesus' nine saving events. We have explored inside and out the six pictures that interpret those events.

But there's more. A fruitful way of considering Christ's saving accomplishment is to construe it in terms of the directions to which it points. When we do so, we find that it points in three directions.

Toward God himself, we'll call that an upward direction. Toward our enemies, a downward direction. And toward the whole creation, believers included a horizontal dimension.

Christ's saving work is directed toward God himself. Most profoundly, the death and resurrection of Christ are directed toward God. Incredibly, the work of Christ affects the life of God himself.

Included here are penal substitution, the Godward aspect of reconciliation, the work of Christ as an aspect of sacrifice, the second Adam motif, and possibly redemption. Penal substitution. Substitution is directed primarily toward God himself.

God propitiates his own justice by bearing the brunt of his wrath in Christ. Because substitution brings us forgiveness, it also has a horizontal direction. A downward direction is implied in Colossians 2:14.15, where substitution drives Christ as victor.

This shouldn't surprise us. Even as the events are combined and the pictures overlap, the directions overlap as well. It's something like saying that although systematic theology is a valid undertaking, all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, instruction, and righteousness; the Bible is not a systematic theology text.

It's a storybook, right, that paints a lot of pictures. So we can derive theology from it, but we should do so exegetically and very carefully. Reconciliation.

Reconciliation occurs in all three directions. Most profoundly, God reconciles himself in the death and resurrection of his son. As a result, human beings are reconciled to God along with the creation.

Colossians 1.20. God's enemies are reconciled in quotation marks in the sense of being subjugated. Colossians 1:20.2:15. Sacrifice. As we saw, the Levitical sacrifices were intended to make atonement for both the people and the sanctuary.

Because the people's sins defiled it, corresponding to this, Hebrews 9:22.23 teaches that Christ's death purifies the heavenly sanctuary itself because our sins defiled it.

In this sense, sacrifice has an upward direction. Second Adam. Even as Adam's disobedience was erected toward God, so was the second Adam's obedience.

He obeyed the Father in all things. Redemption. Question mark.

Scripture never tells us to whom the redemption price is paid. Following my own systematic method, at least sometimes consistently. Certainly, the ransom to Satan view was wrong-headed.

I have always resisted deducing a direction for redemption. John Stott takes the same tack in *The Cross of Christ*, page 175. But if I were to do so, it would be to God.

It would be to say redemption, although scripture doesn't say. Logically, theologically, and logically, it's directed toward God himself. Plainly, there's a horizontal dimension to the people that are redeemed.

So, Christ's work most profoundly is directed toward the life of God himself. St. Anselm was right. What an accomplishment.

Christ's saving work is directed toward our enemies. It is the genius of the Christus Victor theme that directs Christ's death and resurrection toward our foes. Christ's work routes the devil, his demons, the world, rightly considered, death and hell.

At least two other themes have a downward aspect. By the blood of Christ's cross, he reconciles all things, which in context includes thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. Colossians 1:16 and 20.

Christ reconciles the demons by subduing them, thereby maintaining peace in his kingdom. Compare Colossians 2:15. Redemption may be vertical, is certainly horizontal and has downward overtones.

We are delivered from the domain of darkness, Colossians 1:13. And from enslavement to the elementary principles of the world, Galatians 4:3. This theme in Paul is difficult to understand. We're redeemed from the elementary principles of the world.

Paul mentions it more than once. I'm not sure. It gets confusing because the elementary principles sometimes seem to do with an aberrant meritorious Judaism and other times with Gentile paganism.

I forget who suggested this, but as usual, I'm taking the good ideas of others and baptizing them, I hope. So, a possible explanation of the elementary principles of this world from which Christ redeems us is that it represents the demonic element both in aberrant Judaism and in gross paganism. Christ's saving work is directed toward God himself.

It is directed toward our enemies. Also, Christ's saving work is directed toward human beings and even toward the creation. All the themes of the work of Christ

pertain to human beings because, as God told Joseph, you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins, Matthew 1:21.

The various pictures are different ways of expressing Jesus saving his people. Reconciliation means peacemaking, and Christ's death and resurrection make peace with God and then with people. In redemption, God purchases the human slaves of sin at the cost of Christ's blood.

Legal substitution propitiates God and brings forgiveness to the guilty who believe. Christ, our victor's work, is primarily directed at our spiritual foes, but it is horizontal in that it delivers us from their clutches. As the second Adam, Christ obeys God to restore the image of God in us and glory and dominion to us.

Christ, our sacrifice, purifies us with his blood. The creation is really a key. The horizontal dimension of Christ's saving work includes the creation.

Scripture predicts that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Isaiah 65:7-25. Isaiah 66:22-23.

Matthew 19:28 when Jesus speaks of the regeneration or renewal of all things. Romans 8:20-22. 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Revelation 21 and 22. Given the fall, why will there be a new heavens and a new earth? The answer is because of the cross and the empty tomb. The work of Christ has cosmic effects.

This is because, quote, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19 and 20. Christ's work redeems God's world.

For, quote, the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and attain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:20-22. Penal substitution and second Adam images also play roles in the deliverance of the cosmos because even as the curse was a legal penalty imposed due to Adam's disobedience, so lifting the curse is a penal event owing to the second Adam's obedience.

Conclusion. All three directions are important: upward, horizontal, and downward. Christ's saving accomplishment, which centers on his death and resurrection, affects God, human beings, the creation, and our spiritual enemies.

The horizontal, the direction or dimension involving the salvation of human beings, is more prevalent in Scripture than the others. The six pictures involve scores of passages that tell of God's rescuing us sinners through the mediator's work. And

some of those pictures teach that because of Christ's saving work, there will be a new heavens and a new earth.

I will argue below that this dimension, like the downward direction, is a derivative of the upward. The upward dimension directed toward God is the most fundamental and profound. Christ's work influences the life of God himself.

As our summaries have shown, the initiative for the work of Christ belongs to God, the Trinity. That means God acts through the cross and empty tomb to influence himself. He satisfies his justice, reconciles himself, is pleased with the second Adam's obedience, and purifies heaven.

God in Christ affects God. This is profound for several reasons. First, it reflects the greatness of God's grace in the initiative and the accomplishment of salvation.

This story was not conceived on earth by human beings. That is my understanding of Christian theology at its best as an apologetic value. This book was not given to us merely by men.

Oh, it is written by men because the inspiration of Scripture is a subset of the grace of God. God communicated to sinners through their own writings, but God communicated to them, and holy men of God wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, 2 Peter 1:20 and 21. This story was not conceived on earth by human beings.

It was conceived in heaven by God. What kind of a world religion posits that God becomes a man to die in order to satisfy the demands of his own character and thereby save his creatures? A divinely revealed, unique, and gracious religion. The second reason is the mystery of the incarnation itself.

If we cannot fully understand the incarnation, how will we fully understand the cross and empty tomb? Third, the concept of God's entering in the covenant with Abraham and eventually with us in the new covenant provides a framework for understanding how covenant keepers or breakers influence God. But at the end of the day, we confess we are out of our depth trying to understand God's influencing himself through Christ's cross and empty tomb because although Christ is a covenant-keeping man, he is also God. These things are beyond understanding.

They are too much for us. What shall we do? We will be very grateful for them. This upward element is foundational to the horizontal and downward ones.

With the Godward direction of the work of Christ, the other two directions, without the Godward direction, the other two would not exist. They are very important, but

derivative of the influence of Christ's work on God himself. Because God propitiates himself, he defeats our foes and rescues us and the creation.

I agree with Sinclair Ferguson. A comprehensively biblical exposition of the work of Christ recognizes that the atonement, which terminates on God in propitiation and on man in forgiveness, also terminates on Satan in the destruction of his sway over believers. And it does this precisely because it does the first two.

I do not disagree, but I would add that the atonement terminates on man and Satan because it terminates on God. In my terminology, both the horizontal and downward aspects depend on the upward aspect. The downward, *Christus Victor*, is a derivative of the Godward direction.

Ferguson says it well. His reference to Gustav Alain's *Christus Victor*, the book whose title became a letter, a label for this view of the atonement, I quote, in this respect, Gustav Alain's view was seriously inadequate. He displaced the motif of penal satisfaction with that of victory.

But as we have seen in scripture, the satisfaction of divine justice, the forgiveness of our sins, and Christ's defeat of Satan are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Each is an essential dimension of Christ's work. Each is vital for our salvation, and each provides an aspect of the atonement from which the other aspects may be seen with greater clarity and richness.

Moreover, these aspects are interrelated at the profoundest level. For the New Testament, the dramatic aspect of the atonement, *Christus Victor*, involves a triumph that is secured through propitiation. Alain, therefore, failed to recognize that in setting the dramatic view over against the penal view of the atonement, he inevitably innervated the dramatic view of its true dynamic.

Conclusion of the conclusion. I began these lectures by stating that Christ's saving work is profound, massive, and magnificent. I end in the same way.

The work of Christ is massive. Twenty hours of lecture on these events and the biblical pictures do not exhaust his saving work. It is profound.

By giving an attentive ear to God's self-revelation, we can learn a lot, but our knowledge takes us only so far. We cannot fully comprehend the Incarnation. How shall we plumb the depths of the cross and empty tomb? We understand in part, and awaiting the day when we shall understand in full, we worship, serve, and witness.

Full understanding will have to wait. Quote: For now, we see in a mirror darkly and dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, and then I shall be fully known, even as I, then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

1 Corinthians 13:12. The saving work of Christ is magnificent. It pleases God, saves human beings, and vanquishes our foes. Christ's death and resurrection even deliver the creation itself.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain it.

Psalms 139, verse 6. Oh, the depth of the riches, wisdom, and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments are, and how inscrutable his ways are. For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? Romans 11:33 to 35. Amen.

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