

Jesus Saves! But How?

Understanding the doctrine of the atonement, Part 2

By Michael Cheuk

The “Objective” Model

- The death of Christ has an objective purpose: it upholds God’s honor or justice or it appeases God’s anger and wrath

The “Objective” Model

- “God-ward” focus – the work of Christ primarily addresses a necessary demand of God (honor, justice, punishment, etc.)
- Christ as “Priest” – who offers Himself as a sacrifice, a substitute to meet God’s demand
- Terms: justification (declared right), propitiation (appease or satisfy God’s wrath), expiation (removal of guilt)

The “Objective” Model

- Penal Substitution Model - It uses a juridical/legal model to understand how Jesus saves us. In this context, Christ does not pay a debt humans owe to God, but rather Jesus bears the punishment of God against human sin.

The “Objective” Model

- Probably the most prevalent model in Western churches, especially among conservative, Reformed, fundamentalist traditions
- Modern Illustration – courtroom scene

Strengths . . .

- The picture of a courtroom, judge and defendant can be a compelling metaphor and easily understood
- Takes human sin--as defined as moral failure--very, very seriously

Dangers . . .

- Overemphasizing the relative importance of the individual
- Christ bore the penalty of my particular sins that I have committed

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- Overemphasizing the relative importance of the individual

- Christ bore the penalty of my particular sins that I have committed
- Reducing salvation to a mere transaction at His death: my sins are transferred to Christ; His righteousness transferred to me

Dangers . . .

- Reducing Christ's saving work and the divine-human relationship solely to judicial categories, and viewing the cross solely in terms of laws, infractions, judicial pronouncements, and forgiveness
- What role did Jesus' life play? Was His resurrection really necessary?

Other Critiques . . .

- God's character is defined more by wrath than by love?
- Is this a case of 'Divine child abuse', where God the Father is pitted against God the Son?

The "Subjective" Model

- The life and death of Christ is designed first and foremost to effect a change in human subjects—to change their hearts, to heal their brokenness, to adopt them as children of God the Father

The "Subjective" Model

- "Human-ward" focus – the work of Christ primarily consists of demonstrating to the world the amazing depth of God's love for humanity. God does not need to be appeased. Sinful, hardened human hearts need to be reconciled to God.

The "Subjective" Model

- Christ as "Prophet" or Teacher – who teaches and demonstrates the depth of God's love that moves sinners

to repent and love God

- Terms: reconciliation (restore relationship), revelatory (reveal God's love), family-adoption

The "Subjective" Model

- Moral Example Model – the true value of Jesus' life and death is to be found in the fact that it offers us a perfect example of the self-sacrificial dedication to God.

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- Modern Illustration – What Would Jesus Do?

Biblical Warrant

- Romans 5:8 - But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- 1 John 3:16 - We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Strengths . . .

- Emphasizes a more "loving" God

- Our alienation from God can be remedied by the restoration of our love for God and others
- Requires humans to live differently in response to the example of Jesus' life

Dangers . . .

- Still an individualistic model
- May over-estimate human ability to live a moral life
- Some fear that the imitation of Christ on the cross will lead to a glorification of suffering
- Was Jesus' resurrection really necessary?

The "Classical" Model

- Jesus' life, death and resurrection brought about God's victory over Satan and all powers of evil

The "Classical" Model

- "Satan-ward" focus – the work of Christ consists of defeating the power of Satan and liberating human beings from the bondage of evil powers in the world.

The "Classical" Model

- Christ as "King" – who ushers in a new Kingdom, that triumphs over the tyrannical evil powers of the world that has kept humanity in bondage
- Terms: victory, triumph, liberation, redemption

The "Classical" Model

- Christus Victor Model – sees the work of Christ the Victor primarily in terms of his conflict and triumph over those elements of the kingdom of darkness that hold humanity in its clutches.

The "Classical" Model

- This model was once favored by the early Church Fathers. It is currently enjoying a renewal by contemporary theologians especially after Gustav Aulen's 1931 book: *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*

The "Classical" Model

- Modern Illustration – C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Biblical Warrant

- (Gen 3:15) I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."
- The first messianic prophecy given in Scripture—indeed the first prophecy *period*—announced that a descendent of Eve would crush the head of the serpent who originally deceived humanity
- Original disciples saw the Messiah as accomplishing this prophecy: a victory over the ancient serpent

Biblical Warrant

- (Col 1:15-16) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him.
- (Col 1:19-20) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.
- We are reconciled because the cosmos is reconciled through Christ's death (blood of his cross).

Biblical Warrant

- (1 Cor 15:21-26) For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

- Christ's resurrection defeated all other rulers and powers, even death.

Biblical Warrant

- (2 Cor 5:17-19) So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.
- Salvation is a COSMIC reality before it is an individual HUMAN reality

Strengths . . .

- Jesus Christ's work of salvation includes ALL of His life, death AND resurrection
- Salvation is not merely an individual affair – it covers all of creation. Therefore, the saving work of Christ

Strengths . . .

- Salvation is not merely an individual affair – it covers all of creation. Therefore, the saving work of Christ restores our relationship to God, to ourselves, to others and to the cosmos.

Dangers . . .

- In its cosmic outlook, it may downplay individual responsibility and behavior
- May not take human sin seriously enough
- Through its warfare model, it has led to some Christians to overthrow powers and authorities in a violent way

Other Critiques . . .

- It is hard for some of us in the modern world to believe in "spiritual warfare," to believe in the existence of devils
- It does not give us details as to *HOW* God's victory was secured.

- What is the role of the LOVE of God?

End of Part II