

Theology 2.11– Word made flesh

A. VIEWS on ATONEMENT:

1. General:

- a. Most systematic theological approaches teach positions supported by “proof texts.” Proof texts essentially are verses pulled out of context from Scripture to validate a particular position. The problem with this is that it does not yield an overall-organic or holistic understanding of Scripture.
- b. Theology is not something you get out of a book. For theology to be real you need to grapple with the issues on your own before God through the auspices of the Spirit. The text informs the mind, love of God softens the heart. The guidance of the Spirit brings immediacy and clarity. Theology develops as you experience God’s grace and redemptive influences playing out in your life. Theology develops as you see things that don’t make sense to you and you cry out and bring these things to God expecting Him to help you make sense out of them.
- c. There are different approaches to theology:
 - i. Historical theology – deals with theological issues as they have changed throughout the history of the church. Ideas and ideals of what is ‘true’ will change somewhat over time based on cultural and epistemological-ecclesiastical changes. You can look back and see how prominent theologians have revised normative theological thought through history.
 - ii. Biblical theology – deals with theology based on what the Bible says holistically through exegesis and hermeneutics. This is often considered the best approach as it relies on the text to frame and develop theological thought.
 - iii. Systematic theology – deals with specific issues and pulls from a variety of sources, but leans most heavily on proof texts. Systematic theology deals with theological themes one by one rather than employing an organic unified view.
 - iv. Apologetic theology – deals with how a theologian would make their point to a non-believer. The Apostle Paul was a master of this form as he drew from the historical-cultural context of the people to whom he was speaking explaining his point in terms they could grasp. The point is to draw from word concepts already understood by your audience.
 - v. Practical and personal theology recognizes that God develops each person’s theology out of their world and life experiences. Such that each person will have a somewhat different perspective.
 - vi. Integrative theology – seeks to unify all of these approaches to provide a greater view of the issues.

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- d. **Most people take years and years to work out their own theology... and do so alone without the benefit of a mentor to guide their process. This is unwise. It is always helpful to have a mentor you trust who has walked with God a long time to provide you with counsel and alternative ways of thought. In the end, each person is responsible for their own thinking and their own actions before God.**
 - e. **Just knowing facts or various approaches without personally fighting through the issues is not particularly useful, and certainly not transformational. Once you have fought through issues prayerfully and diligently through Scripture with the guidance of the Spirit and more mature mentors does it really become your own.**
- 2. Pre-Cross versus post-Cross**
- a. **Jesus teachings stayed in the context of His mission to the Jews until their rejection of Him and His crucifixion. When the Jews rejected their King and Messiah, the way was opened for direct access to all peoples. This was always God’s plan, but it had to unfold in history.**
 - b. **Jesus fulfilled the Law up through the Cross – then everything changed... for the better! After the cross atonement was made for all of humanity, not just the nation of Israel. After Pentecost the Spirit was made available to all who in faith believing received Jesus as Savior and Lord.**
 - c. **Thematic changes of Pre-Cross versus Post-Cross:**
 - i. **Inclusion of Gentiles as Equal Citizens of the Kingdom of God:**
 - 1. **OT – Numbers 15 – states there was only 1 Law for both the natural born Jew and the God-Fearing Gentile; there was no distinction made between them.**
 - 2. **The truth was that OT and NT era Gentiles were definitely not equal with the Jews; they were included only on Israel’s terms.**
 - 3. **After the Cross – this was no longer the case... Jew and Gentile were on even standing before God, this is a huge change!**
 - ii. **Sacrificial System:**
 - 1. **Was the norm for atonement and sin up until the Cross. God had decreed that the only remedy for forgiveness of sin was through Temple sacrifice. However, only Jews could enter the holy place of the Temple, Gentiles were relegated to an outsider position.**
 - 2. **Jewish belief was based on faith AND works... your actions validated your faith. True faith needed both good works and belief.**
 - 3. **After the Cross it was justification by faith alone... although it is expected that personal change will accompany true faith, it is no longer a requirement. This is a huge change! OT Tithing was based on paying tribute to an overlord... it was a required or compelled system. OT love**

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offerings are based on pleasing God and deliberately aligning oneself with His purpose and interests. It is no longer a matter of compulsion.

iii. Response to God:

1. John 4:21-23 – The generally accepted idea of what God was looking for from His worshipers was faith and works. Temple worship was the norm, synagogue study was the norm.
2. Was the change dramatic or subtle?
3. God’s plan was always the same – but the proclamation changes over time. This is how theology plays out ‘Diachronically’ – throughout redemptive history. It is still faith at work in us and through us, but our approach to God has changed – we now have the Spirit indwelling us and have no need of a Temple to worship... as our own hearts is now the Temple in which God resides and communicates with humanity.
4. NT revelation shows that both Jesus and the disciples teaching do change after the Cross:
 - a. Focus is on the person’s intent, not on their action alone.
 - b. Faith is always more valuable than works.
 - c. Role of the Spirit versus the Law – the Law was a custodian until Messiah came and the Spirit set free.
 - d. Jesus cleansing of the Temple set the stage for the cleansing of the human heart. Interestingly, the place they had set up for selling was the Temple court reserved for the Gentiles... their practice prevented the righteous faithful non-Jews from coming to worship God.
 - e. God’s abode on earth is the temple of a human heart, not the temple in Jerusalem.
 - f. Biblical values of morality and ethics remain consistent – the ideals remain the same, but the means change over time. In the NT we have the indwelling Spirit to engage Spiritual transformation and sanctification where God enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. The OT Law provided no power for such personal change.
 - g. Cross & resurrection teachings are subtle before the Cross... Psalms (especially Psalm 22) and prophecy such as Isaiah’s Songs of the suffering servant provide OT insights into the necessity of the cross. In the NT much is inferred and hinted at in the Gospels, but afterward in the Epistles it is clearly stated – Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the perfect atonement reuniting God

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and humanity in His own Body... He did what none other could do and as a consequence He is to be worshipped and praised... and doing so glorifies the Father. It is not accidental that the majority of the earliest Christians were Jews... then it radiated outward. The Jews understood the redemptive gift Jesus offered and the freedom that was provided in the Spirit.

5. Getting right with God completely changes with the Cross:
 - a. Jesus is the only Name by which one is saved.
 - b. Holy Spirit indwelling now leads believers into righteousness... caretaker role of the Law is ended, God Himself now perfects us [Phil 1:6].
 - c. Joel 2 – Law is now written on human hearts, and the Spirit is poured out onto humanity.
- iv. Emphasis of the cross changes in Acts:
 1. Joel 2 is supported in Acts 2:17-21.
 2. Jesus is Lord and Christ – 2:36.
 3. Peter’s leadership proclamation demonstrates a fundamental change that had occurred in him – something done by the Spirit not through his own strength or wisdom.
 4. Call to repent continues – 2:38.
 5. Baptism in the name of Jesus is new... before it was John’s baptism. John’s baptism was of repentance and ceremonial cleansing carried over from the OT Law. Jesus baptism is the atonement for sin and enables the adoption as sons and daughters into the Kingdom of God guaranteed by the indwelling Spirit.
 6. Believer’s identification with Jesus is new – He alone can forgive sin. Jesus forgave some people during His earthly ministry... but now in Acts all can be forgiven by faith in His atoning blood shed for all on the Cross.
- v. Forgiveness Teachings & Parables:
 1. Jesus teaching in Luke 7:42 demonstrates the inability of the debtor to repay... this is typical of these teachings. We are the slaves to sin who could not repay the debt we owe... so Jesus paid it for us, but it must be accepted and received by faith.
 2. Demonstrates that works have no value to God... it is faith alone in repentance that is what Jesus is looking for.
 3. Islam & Judaism have prayer, works, faith, and limited forgiveness. What you do is crucial for who you are and in your final judgment... in their system, sinners/infidels are not going to have access to heaven.

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4. Only Christianity has complete forgiveness... not just what you've done but for who you are – our failed nature is cleansed by faith.
 5. Repentance is continuous throughout Scripture as a necessary pre-condition to forgiveness and justification before God.
 6. Gospels teach redemptive progress occurs through the cross [atonement], through acceptance [justification], through being transformed [sanctification], and resurrection [eternal life].
 7. Acts 3:11ff – Forgiveness as baptism in Jesus is new in Acts and epistles.
 - a. Vs 16 – faith in Jesus brings healing.
 - b. Vs 18 – crucifixion.
 - c. Vs 19 – repent for forgiveness of sins.
 8. Acts 5:17ff demonstrates that the roll of Jesus is now elevated... He has assumed a new authority... kicked up a few notches!
 - a. Vs 30 – Jesus raised.
 - b. Vs 31 – Jesus exalted.
- d. After the Cross:
- i. Response from people remains the same... some will accept the offer and believe others won't.
 - ii. Kingdom message continues – it is effective because God enables it.
 - iii. Worship of God develops... Trinity is now engaged completely with humanity... all three Persons of the Godhead are actively involved.
 - iv. Worship of Jesus begins:
 1. Acts 8:25 – believe & be baptized... reflects Isaiah 53 passage.
 2. Acts 17:22 – Paul's sermon on Mars Hill... death & resurrection = eternal life. The concept of 'belief' in Acts now has a much broader sense incorporating repentance and Spiritual transformation.

B. FREE GRACE ARTICLE – Ken Neff on Zane Hodges... liberal theologians argue that Grace and faith can remain rudimentary. Moderate and conservative theologians would argue that faith should develop and strengthen as we mature as Christians. Thoughts on belief:

1. John 20:31 – belief is simple and not complicated.
 - a. Children don't understand their wretchedness... they don't really understand sin.
 - b. Children's innocence would seem to exclude them from the need of repentance.
 - c. Somewhere in our teen to adult years we come to understand that we are not what we hoped or expected because of sin and now we understand the need for repentance... forgiveness becomes more complex as a result.
 - d. What do you need to know to be saved? What do you have to express? Does it change with age and maturity? Scripture examples are:

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- i. Simple trust – like children.
 - ii. Desperate need and hopelessness – like the thief being crucified with Jesus.
 - iii. Very complicated – as with the rich young ruler.
 - iv. There is no one solution for all, and each comes to Jesus with different issues and criteria.
 - e. How do confidence and perseverance play out? What about the followers that ceased to follow Jesus... Jesus didn't try to talk them out of leaving, He allowed the offense of His teaching stand.
2. 5 ways to play out salvation doctrine for evangelism depending on your own reformed theological perspectives:
 - a. Most liberal – some will argue that you can deny Jesus and still be saved; they use the excuse of spiritual immaturity of children as an example of free grace. They argue that some can even hold to heretical views and be saved.
 - b. Less liberal – you can deny or not know sound doctrine, there is room for those with rudimentary belief alone... much like the thief on the cross.
 - c. Middle point moderates – it comes down to ignorance, some don't really know how things work together theologically but they can still be saved by their rudimentary belief.
 - d. More conservative – must maintain correct doctrine on the major essentials to be saved, but there is room for error in other lesser things.
 - e. Most conservative [strict Calvinists] – doctrine must be correctly known and understood for salvation to be effective. Just believing isn't sufficient, you also have to know and understand the truth, and also act accordingly.
3. How does faith – trust & obedience play out?" How does personal dependence work out?
4. The Gospel is both broad and narrow in terms of Scriptural description... there are easier and more difficult concepts as well as simple and more complex faith. Church practice is what tends to direct normative faith.
5. We need to know what we believe to be true... but then hold out judgment loosely. Only Jesus knows the heart... He accepts faith or rejects it. The fact that the healings in Jesus' earthly ministry had so many different ways to bring healing about would indicate that faith is not a one-size-fits-all matter.

C. THEORIES OF ATONEMENT

1. "Substitution Theory" – if God wants to forgive... why doesn't He just do it? McLaren in his fable The Story we find ourselves in voices the argument of Islamic scholars in this.
 - a. McLaren speaks of God "absorbing" punishment due to humanity – this is a weak view of atonement that is consistent with post-moderns who don't relate well with a God who is Holy and Just and enforces judgment upon the non-repentant.

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- b. Jews and Muslims say they don't need a substitutionary atonement – each person pays for or is rewarded for what they do, not necessarily commensurate with their belief. In their thinking, the Law is adequate and Jesus didn't need to die for sin atonement, as each person stands on their own action.
- c. OT paints a picture of substitutionary atonement in the sacrifice rituals – especially for “Day of Atonement” and sin offerings. This is the basis for the NT concepts as the fulfillment of OT Law. Diachronic theology has these themes play out developmentally through redemptive history.
 - i. There is a necessity for blood sacrifice – the OT sacrificial system was based on substitutionary blood sacrifice.
 - ii. Jesus died on the Passover – this is a HUGE HINT! To fulfill OT Law, this was the only day Jesus could have died on the cross. Jesus' resurrection on the Sunday after Passover likens to the joy in Israel when all the eldest males were spared while the eldest Egyptian males were sacrificed.
 - iii. Parable of debtors – they were incapable of repaying the debt they owed – they needed help from God, and He graciously provided it.
 - iv. Jesus had to die – the offense to our modern sensibilities is otherwise an offense to God – telling Him He needn't have bothered and that Jesus needn't have suffered.
 - v. The curtain in the Temple had to have been torn – from top to bottom. It was probably 30' high and 2-3" thick making it impossible for a man to tear – another HUGE HINT! God Himself was removing the barrier separating humanity from God.
 - vi. Creation had to respond to Jesus death – clearly indicating someone other than a mere man was here... this wasn't just another crucifixion! Since the events were “written in the Stars” and since the celestial bodies move in appointed clockwork, Jesus entry and exit on earth were predetermined before creation was set in motion. [Check out the DVD of “The Bethlehem Star”]
- d. McLaren tries to take the offense of the Cross out of the Gospel and you can't... it is integral. Just as God declared self-revelation – 1st through creation [Ps 19 General Revelation] and later in Scripture [special revelation], He determines the concepts and rules of engagement for restoration. We need to accept God's plan on His terms.
- e. Another way of thinking about it – you have a mortgage loan. You go to the teller and they:
 - i. Say don't worry that you can't pay this back, we'll just cancel your debt. You get it for free, but since this is selective someone else gets screwed and arguably justice is not served.

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- ii. **Say don't worry... I'll take care of it. Later you see the teller working digging ditches. When you ask why he's digging ditches, he explains he is working your debt off. This is substitution... this is Grace. Something you don't deserve, it is a gift of grace.**
- f. **Substitution accomplishes all of the following:**
 - i. **Fulfillment of OT Law.**
 - ii. **Passover example – blood remedy for a horrific judgment – do this or else....**
 - iii. **Forgiveness of sin that we couldn't repay.**
 - iv. **Displays the character of God – kindness, love and mercy play out in justice and satisfaction of debt – God paid the price Himself.**
 - v. **Jesus victory over death and Satan is a reality.**
 - vi. **It provides an example for me to live out... to pick up your cross and follow Me... we die to ourselves to live for God.**
- 2. **“Ransom Theory” – Jesus paid our debt to Satan to ransom us from his grasp. Some see this as a transaction with Satan as opposed to a remedy with God. This is a naive approach that doesn't do justice in dealing with God's holiness.**
- 3. **“Christos Victor Theory” – Jesus victory over is over Satan & death, but does not include sin – this falls short again because it doesn't deal with God's justice.**
- 4. **“Moral influence Theory” – the story provides archetype for what we each need to do in living a life that is both sacrificial and personally holy. This falls short because we cannot live a life pleasing to God.**
- 5. **“Powerful-weakness/vulnerable-servant Theory” – Cross is only a metaphor and has no reality behind it. This is another humanistic construct that also insults God and Messiah.**