**Who Needs Theology?**

**The Work of Jesus**

**Class #12**

-The debate the church fathers had over the doctrine of Christ was primarily a concern to protect the reality of salvation through Christ.

-They believed that Christ’s life and death are the sole basis for the salvation of humanity through the grace and mercy of God.

“Jesus’ life and death objectively provide for reconciliation between God and humanity and make possible forgiveness and transformation of those who believe and trust him.” (Roger Olson, p. 246).

-The consensus of the church has been that: (Olson, 251).

-Jesus provides salvation for the world/humanity by his life, death and resurrection.

-God has acted in Jesus’ death on the cross to reconcile the world/humanity with himself and to make possible the forgiveness and transformation of sinners.

*Questions*

Why did Jesus have to die in order for humanity to be saved?

Why couldn’t God simply declare humanity forgiven?

a) Objective theories: The belief that in the cross event something was actually achieved on behalf of humanity by God in Christ

-Any view that regards Christ’s death on the cross as a payment of a required penalty by Christ on behalf of humanity.

b) Subjective theories: The cross makes possible and enables a necessary response within the human person needing salvation.

-Any view that sees Christ’s death on the cross as an example or a transforming influence on humanity.

-Most Christians agree that there is an objective and a subjective truth to what happened on the cross.

*Different Theories of what happened on the cross*

1. Ransom theory (Popular with many in the early church)

-Christ death on the cross was necessary because Satan had captured humanity due to Adam’s sin.

-Because Satan’s hold on humanity was legally binding, God had to deal justly with Satan and so he paid his Son Jesus as a ransom to the devil to win back humanity.

\*Objective.

-(example - CS Lewis - Aslan and the White Witch).

1. Satisfaction theory (Anselm/Middle Ages)

-Christ paid the debt owned by sinful man to satisfy and honour God who had been dishonoured by our sin.

-Feudal system – if a vassal dishonoured his Lord by betraying him in some way he “owed him satisfaction” – often this being his life.

-Christ death was the substitutionary payment of a debt owed by humanity to honour God, which was robbed by sin.

-This theory depicts the atonement of the cross as a transaction between God and Jesus Christ.

-“It is finished” – God is satisfied – his wrath is appeased.

\*Objective.

-(example – *The Passion of the Christ*)

1. Moral influence theory (Peter Abelard)

-Objected to Anslem’s system which he found too harsh.

-God needs sinful people to repent from their sins and to throw themselves on the mercy of God.

-Christ demonstrates this by his great love for God and for humanity by laying down his life for humanity and thus changing the nature of sinner’s hearts in order to draw them to God.

\*Subjective.

1. Christ the Victor theory (Luther)

-Christ’s atoning work for humanity was his victorious invasion and conquest of Satan’s territory where we humans were held captive.

-Christ fights and triumphs over the evil powers of this world and defeats Satan.

-Spiritual warfare.

-(example – *The Holy War –* John Bunyan)

\*Objective.

-Great sermon material but this doesn’t explain why Jesus had to die. (Olson)

1. Penal Substitution theory (Most familiar in conservative Protestants circles)

(Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon, Graham)

-God was justly angry at humanity for her sin and yet loved humanity.

-God demonstrated love for us and dealt with our sin justly by Christ’s sacrificial death on our behalf.

-In Jesus’ death on the cross our sins were given to Jesus and Jesus’ righteousness was given to us.

-Similar to Anslem’s satisfaction theory, but the shift moved from the emphasis of a debt owed by humanity to God (although Calvin still spoke in those terms) to the emphasis being on our punishment.

-Christ’s death was not so much paid to the wounded honour of God, but as a capital punishment and retribution for disobeying God’s law.

-Christ died in our place on our behalf.

-(example – someone paying off your debt or taking your punishment).

\*Objective.

-For the most part Christian denominations have avoided identifying with only one theory as *the* orthodox one.

1. Substitutionary Atonement theory (Baptist/mainstream evangelical/Pentecostal)

-Similar to the Penal Substitution theory, but the emphasis is on Christ paying the consequences of death due to sin, rather than the price of an angry punishing God.

-God does not break his own moral order/character and so couldn’t just ignore sin and its consequence of death.

-Thus, through Christ’s substitutionary death he paid the wages of sin and upheld the moral order of his/God’s character instilled throughout his creation.

*Generally*

Eastern Orthodox – favour Ransom

Catholic – favour Satisfaction

Lutheran – favour Christ the Victor

Reformed – favour Penal Substitution

(some in this camp say it is the only orthodox theory – i.e. Charles Hodge).

Baptist / Evangelical / Pentecostals – favour Substitutionary Atonement

Angelical / Methodists – favour a broad outlook

***Part #2***

-If a person becomes saved how and why does this happen?

-What is the *order of* salvation?

-What part does God play in our salvation?

-What part does a person have to do with there salvation?

-Is it all the work of God?

-Do people somehow cooperate with God?

-Luther believed that the Catholic church of his day was implicitly denying the gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone (and in many senses he was correct).

-Yet the history and profound divisions of Protestantism ended up having mostly to do with their differing beliefs about salvation.

-So, although, Luther was correct in pointing out how the Catholic Church’s thinking had become unbiblical.

-The question of what role God and humans play in salvation has not been that easy to answer.

-Mostly because the Bible seems to uphold a kind-of paradox in regards to this.

\*Eph. 2:8-9 v. Jas. 2:24

\*Phil. 2:12-13

\*Eph. 2:8-10

*Two Main Positions* (and there are many variations in between)

1. Monergism – God is the sole sovereign agent in salvation so that even the task

of salvation is secretly and entirely the work of God in the person being saved.

-(often associated with Calvinism, but around much longer than Calvin)

2. Synergism – Salvation is a cooperative project and process in which God is the superior partner and the human person being saved is the inferior but nevertheless crucial partner.

-(often associated with Arminianism, but around much longer than Arminius. The majority position of the early church until Augustine).

*Catholic / Protestant Differences*

-Protestants agree that salvation is entirely a free gift of God’s grace received by faith alone *which results in* works of love.

-Justification *which results in* sanctification.

-See justification and sanctification as two separate things.

-Catholics believe that salvation is a gift received by faith *and* works of love.

-Salvation is a process of a believing faith and external works (i.e. baptism, communion, confession).

-See justification and sanctification as the same thing.

*Heresies*

1. Christ’s saving work is not necessary for everyone.

-Other people can be saved in other ways or through other means.

-Unitarian and some liberal theologians.

-Pluralist.

-Christ is the way for Christians but other leaders/systems are the way for other people.

-Christ is *merely* a great example (Moral Influence Theory *alone* falls into this trap).

1. Pelagianism

- Places the initiative of salvation in the autonomous human will apart from any special assisting and calling grace of God.

1. Semi-Pelagianism

-Places the initiative of salvation in the autonomous human will which God then participates with.

-“God helps those who help themselves.”

-Is the Catholic view semi-pelagianism/heretical?

-They would deny this and say that the initial work is God’s and we respond by faith *and* doing works of love.

-Protestants would say that the initial work is God’s and we respond by faith *which results in* doing works of love.

-*And / which results in -* works of love is the great Catholic/Protestant debate.

-Just like God *wills / allows -* is the great Calvin/Arminian debate in Protestantism?

1. Universalism

-Everyone will ultimately be saved because of Christ’s death.

(Origen – even the devil will be saved)

\*Go over chart

*Conclusion*

In the event of the cross something was actually achieved on behalf of humanity by God in Christ (**objective**) which enabled a necessary response within the human person needing salvation (**subjective**).

Salvation is a gift of grace – not at all deserved or earned (**gift**) – and yet, at the same time, it is received by persons through grateful reception through repentance and faith (**task**).

*Questions*

1. Why do you think Christ had to die in order for humanity to be forgiven? Why could God not have just forgiven us without having to sacrifice his Son?
2. Which theory of Christ’s death have you held to (been taught)?

(Ransom, Satisfaction, Christ the Victor, Moral Influence, Penal Substitution, Subtitunitary Atonement)

1. Do you think one of these theories is correct or do you think more than one of these theories (or even all of them) could be correct? If so which one(s) and why?

The Bible teaches us *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you* (Phil. 2:12-13) and that *it is by grace that you are saved… not by works… for you were created in Christ to do good works* (Eph. 2:8-9).

1. How do you explain this paradox? What role does good works play in our

salvation? Can a person be saved and live a life that does not produce any good works?

1. Do you believe that Jesus died for everyone or just for the elect? (Why?)
2. Do you believe that a person can resist God’s grace? (Why?)
3. Do you believe that a Christian can lose/forfeit their salvation? (Why?)
4. What do you think happens to a person who dies never hearing of Jesus Christ, but they followed God to the best of their understanding during their life?