

The Atonement: A Whole Atonement Theology from A Spirit-filled Perspective

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The atonement of Jesus Christ stands at the center of Christian theology and our lived experience as Christians. With Resurrection Sunday approaching, I thought it would be great to publish a theological summary of the atonement from a Whole Atonement position. The Whole Atonement Theory affirms that the cross accomplishes a unified and multifaceted work of redemption that cannot be reduced to a single explanatory model. Scripture presents the atonement as substitutionary, propitiatory, redemptive, reconciling, and victorious. As Charismatics, our theology fully affirms the objective work of Christ and emphasizes the experiential and pneumatic dimensions of this saving act. Together these elements reveal the fullness of God's redemptive purpose in Christ.

At its core, the atonement addresses the problem of sin in humanity before a holy God. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, English Standard Version [ESV], 2001). Because God is righteous, sin incurs divine judgment (Rom. 6:23). The cross demonstrates both God's justice and His love because Christ was put forward "as a propitiation by his blood" to show God's righteousness (Rom. 3:25–26, ESV, 2001). As Gregg Allison (2011) explains, the atonement satisfies divine justice while simultaneously manifesting divine mercy. Penal substitution is therefore indispensable; Christ "bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24, ESV, 2001). Without substitution, reconciliation would lack a foundation of objective grounding.

Yet penal substitution does not exhaust the meaning of the cross. Williams (1988) insists that the atonement must be understood in its biblical fullness, encompassing reconciliation, redemption, and victory. Through Christ, "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor. 5:19, ESV, 2001). Redemption language further depicts liberation: the Son of Man came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45, ESV, 2001). Olson (2007) notes that the cross must be interpreted within the larger narrative of God's saving action, where justice, love, and covenant faithfulness converge. The atonement is therefore not merely legal transaction but a covenant restoration.

A Whole Atonement Theory also affirms Christus Victor. Christus Victor is the Biblical and theological understanding that through His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ decisively defeated the powers of sin, death, and Satan, triumphing over the forces that held humanity in bondage (Col. 2:15, ESV). In this view, the atonement is not only the satisfaction of divine justice but also the victorious liberation of God's people and the inauguration of His kingdom reign.

At the cross, God “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame” (Col. 2:15, ESV, 2001). The atonement breaks the tyranny of sin, death, and Satan. Pentecostal theology resonates deeply with this dimension, as deliverance, healing, and spiritual authority flow from Christ’s triumph. Williams (1990) emphasizes that the saving work of Christ extends beyond forgiveness to liberation from demonic bondage and the restoration of divine rule. The resurrection confirms this victory: Christ “was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25, ESV, 2001). Therefore, the atonement is not defeat but decisive conquest.

Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity further stresses the experiential appropriation of the atonement through the Holy Spirit. The cross and Pentecost belong together in the economy of salvation. The Spirit applies what Christ accomplished, bearing witness that believers are reconciled children of God (Rom. 8:15–16, ESV, 2001). Williams (1992) situates soteriology within a trinitarian framework: the Father sends the Son, the Son accomplishes redemption, and the Spirit actualizes its benefits in believers and the church. The atonement results not only in justification but also in sanctification and empowerment for mission.

Additionally, healing is often viewed within Pentecostal theology as included in the atonement’s redemptive scope. Isaiah declares, “with his wounds we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, ESV, 2001). While interpretations vary, many Spirit-filled theologians see physical healing as flowing from Christ’s redemptive work, though not always immediately realized. Hall (2008) cautions that atonement theology must avoid reductionism; the cross addresses the totality of human brokenness which includes spiritual, relational, and cosmic dimensions. Whole Atonement Theory affirms that salvation is as comprehensive as the fall in Eden.

Importantly, this integrative approach to understanding the atonement resists false dichotomies. The atonement is not either penal substitution or Christus Victor, not either objective reconciliation or subjective transformation. It is all these realities in unified divine action. Allison (2011) underscores that biblical metaphors should be held together rather than set in competition. Likewise, Olson (2007) warns against narrowing the gospel to a single explanatory scheme. Whole Atonement Theology, therefore, maintains doctrinal fidelity while embracing Biblical breadth.

For Spirit-filled believers, the cross is both proclamation and power. The Apostle Paul declares that the word of the cross “is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, ESV, 2001). That power is manifested in forgiveness, Holy Spirit baptism, personal holiness, healing, deliverance, and missional boldness. The atonement establishes the foundation on which the Holy Spirit builds the renewed people of God. It restores covenant communion and inaugurates the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

In summary, the atonement is the decisive act of the Triune God in which justice is satisfied, wrath is propitiated, sin is borne, captives are freed, enemies are reconciled, and the powers of darkness are defeated. Whole Atonement Theory preserves this full Biblical witness while

affirming Pentecostal and Charismatic positions. Whole Atonement Theory emphasizes both spiritual victory and experiential transformation. At the cross, mercy and truth meet (Ps. 85:10), and through the Holy Spirit the benefits of Christ's finished work are dynamically applied to the Church and the world He created.

References

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