



# into the Melting Pot

*the question is more important than the answer*

Sunday 18 May 2014 - **Are You Saved?**

**Seven Theories of Atonement – what is it and what does it mean?**

A précis by Rob Hilton, based on 'The Story We Find Ourselves In - Adventures Of A New Kind Of Christian' by Brian McLaren (pp101 – 107)

*The Problem - how God deals with human sin.*

*The Answer is Jesus - but what does his death mean, and in what way does it express or restore the relationship between God and people? If God wants to forgive us, why doesn't he just do it? Why is the death of Jesus needed?*

**1 Penal Substitution** - the most common today?

Sin requires punishment, and that means we deserve it. God sent Jesus into the world to absorb all the punishment for our sins. So on the cross an angry God delivered his wrath on his son who absorbed it all as a substitute for us. As Jesus died, our sins were therefore forgiven.

The enemy is God's wrath, which Jesus receives, thus freeing us from that wrath.

**2 Ransom Theory** - The oldest theory.

Through sin, human beings sell themselves to Satan, and put themselves under his authority. Jesus comes and offers his own life as a ransom, he does a deal with Satan, that says 'if I give you myself in death will you release them and let them go?' Satan agrees and then God double-crosses him with the resurrection!

Jesus was ravaged by the worst kind of evil and in doing so turned evil back in on itself. God is self-giving goodness and his selflessness cancels out/absorbs God's anger at Sin. The enemy is Satan and Jesus' death buys us freedom from captivity.

**3 Christus Victor** - most dominant through 2000 years of Christian thought.

The enemy is death, which is the natural consequence of sin, and Jesus' death opens a previously unopened door to eternal life that means we can share his resurrection and live again after death.

**4 Perfect Penitent** - C S Lewis' favourite theory.

If God wants to forgive us, why doesn't he just do so? Well, for forgiveness to 'work', it has to follow sincere and real repentance. None of us can actually properly repent because sin has affected us so thoroughly; by his death Jesus acts out the perfect penitence on our behalfs, he represents all of humanity to God, who is then able to give true and proper forgiveness.

The enemy here is ourselves, what sin has made us unable to do.

### **5 Moral Influence** - or as Rob calls it: 'Communicating Love'

The cross demonstrates Jesus' self giving, his complete abandonment to God's will, and their self devotion to the world. His death is an expression of his whole life and completes it. He reveals the self giving love of God and it is such love that we cannot but be moved by it; it 'wins us over'. Jesus invites us into God's self giving.

The enemy here is our own lack of love, which is won over such that we are enabled to love others as he has loved us (Rob says we are truly converted or changed). It demonstrates God's vulnerability.

### **6 Powerful weakness** - or maybe 'Foolish Wisdom'

On the cross, and throughout his passion (a decision he made so let such events unfold), Jesus took suffering from everyone, rather than as punishment delivering suffering on everyone. It shows God's loving heart for forgiveness, not revenge. Wisdom is found in sacrifice not violence, suffering is to be accepted and transformed into reconciliation.

Human violence/pride/arrogant power is the enemy, and it's rejected to be replaced by love. (Rob says this is the way of Gandhi, Mandela, and Tutu - the way of Jesus becomes a way for us, a tool for changing the world).

### **7 Love Hurts - a human story.** (Condensed from Neo's experience – pp 106/7)

"When my wife had an affair, I was devastated. I felt the betrayal physically. I thought I knew her, understood her, had a perfect relationship with her. But you think you know someone and then the trust is betrayed. Your whole world goes empty, your stomach burns, your legs go numb your neck feels cold, you feel as if your lungs are breathing noxious gas, and your brain feels like some big fire alarm is going off so loudly you can't bear it. We had counselling, we talked, she said she was sorry. I loved her, I'd made solemn vows, I believed in marriage, I still do, so I forgave her. It was the hardest thing I've ever done.

When I think of the cross, that's what I remember, for on the cross God's agony and love are made visible - the pain of absorbing, forgiving, and forgoing any revenge; risking that you'll be hurt again. But for the sake of love for the one who most needs it, you do it, and are willing to do it again and again.

Why does forgiveness hurt so much? "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do".

### **Rob's joint favourites**

5 and 6: Communicating Love and Foolish Wisdom.

### **For discussion and reflection**

- 1) What is attractive / unattractive about each of the theories?
- 2) Is there an enemy, and if so, what's the best expression of it?
- 3) Where was God when Jesus died?
  - In heaven?
  - On the cross?
  - Where / what is the role of the Holy Spirit?
- 4) We need to ask 'what is God like? How has Jesus revealed Him in the ministry that precedes his death? If we can get a grip on this, we must see a consistency through his death as an ongoing part of the same ministry. Then we can give meaning to his death.' What do you think?!