

The last time the catechism class met, we discussed the first 4 points of the confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. We talked about what Mennonites confess about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and about interpreting Scripture. We learned that, although many people have very different opinions about these – even in the Mennonite faith tradition, we do hold some things in common – and this is what we bring when we come together as a body.

Now, while these are vital and important and conversation-inducing topics, today, I want to focus more on the chapters about Sin and Salvation – and out of that, mainly, we want to look at atonement.

The Easter season (in which we are now living) is a time of reflection and telling the story of the disciples discovering that God keeps promises. It's a time when we especially reflect on the meaning of what Jesus' death and resurrection meant for the disciples back then and for us the disciples today. Atonement is that mysterious – forgiveness part of Jesus' death and resurrection that is sometimes hard to put to words. Many times, we actually don't really do a lot of thinking about Jesus' atoning actions. In fact, many times we just repeat again what we have been taught – or what we read or hear or watch – and don't actually spend a great deal of time reflecting on it.

In our Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, we read that “We receive God's salvation when we repent of sin and accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. In Christ, we are reconciled with God and brought into the reconciling community of God's people.” This is known as atonement. At One Ment.

But that is so confusing. What does that mean? How can a perfect, supremely mysterious – yet so near – God ever forgive sinful us? What is it about Jesus that saves us? And what difference does that make in how we live our lives?

April Yamasaki – pastor, author, editor, and speaker at our Harvest Fest in 2019, has written a lot about this subject. In her sermon, published in the Vision magazine, entitled, “How we see salvation: What difference does it make” she writes, “There's no one place in the Bible that answers these questions. Instead, part of the answer is in the book of Romans, part of the answer is in 1 Corinthians, and other parts of the answers are found in other parts of the Bible. So, in the history of the Christian church, instead of simply saying, “Here, read the Bible; it's in the somewhere,” [we] have explained salvation in a more systematic way by pulling together answers from different parts of the Bible.¹” Even our Confession of Faith recognizes three different theories of atonement/ reconciling to God.²

To be clear – and to reiterate – every single atonement theory mentioned today is completely Biblical as well as clearly prayed over, discussed, and debated from our early church theologians to today.

The first view of Atonement – perhaps the most popular view – is called the *Substitutionary Atonement Theory*. I like to call it the “Washed in the Blood” atonement theory and it's first recording happened in the 11th century through the writings of Anselm of Canterbury, UK.

¹ Yamasaki, April. “How We See Salvation: What Difference Does It Make.” Essay. In *Vision: A Journal For Church and Theology* 7, 1st ed., 7:48–53. Salvation. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 2006.

² “Article 8. Salvation - Mennonite Church USA.” Mennonite Church USA, June 11, 2020. <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/who-are-mennonites/what-we-believe/confession-of-faith/salvation/>.

Picture it as a hockey game. In hockey, if a player breaks a rule, they serve a penalty. But if the goalie fouls, another player will step in to serve the penalty, even though that player did nothing wrong. Similarly, Jesus serves as our substitute, enduring the penalty for our sins by sacrificing himself on the cross. His blood has blotted out our transgressions.

1 Peter 2:22-25 quotes Isaiah 53
2nd Corinthians 5:21

This theory underscores the seriousness of sin and highlights salvation as a free gift from God. We don't earn forgiveness; we simply accept it.

As an example of Substitutionary Atonement, let's sing together *To God be the glory* VT 84

The Early Church fathers, Irenaeus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa - 2nd - 6th Century AD wrote and spoke of Christ's victory over death. This theory of atonement is called *Christus Victor*. And when we look at Christ's death and resurrection from this perspective, we are reminded that we are not alone in our struggles. Christ's victory paves the way for our freedom from sin and death.

April Yamasaki describes *Christus Victor* as a horse race, not because we can bet on it, but because it's a bit of a surprise. Imagine a thrilling race where the record breaking fastest horse, Git-up-and-git, has taken the early lead and keeps it even through the final turn...and just when you think she's going to win, here comes Eggplant Delight, the underdog. Eggplant Delight, fourth out the gate, the obvious underdog, wins by more than 4 lengths.

Salvation is a drama, a struggle with the forces of sin and evil...and when all seems lost, God sends Jesus to join in our struggle. At first, it looks like even Jesus will lose—he suffers temptation, opposition; he is arrested, and put to death. But three days later, God raises Jesus in victory over sin and death!

In Acts 2:22-24 we read:
1 Corinthians 15:55-57

When we understand our salvation this way, we know that we are not alone because Christ has entered our struggle. Because Jesus has triumphed, death and sin have been defeated.

Let's sing a *Christus Victor* Song: *Thine is the Glory* 355 VT

Abelard, an 11th Century theologian, and philosopher saw Jesus' life and death as a demonstration of God's love that moves sinners to repent and love God. This is called *Moral Influence Atonement*.

We had two fairly famous athletes who grew up near where I pastored in Drake, SK. Jordan Hendry brought the Stanley Cup to the little town of Nokomis, SK, 16 miles from Drake - after the Blackhawks won in 2010.

Nokomis is about the size of Lind and you cannot imagine the excitement. The Drake school bussed the kids to the Nokomis school so they too could touch the Stanley cup. I can imagine every child on that bus coming home was talking about how they'd someday bring the Stanley cup to Drake.

Cori Bartel was even closer to us in Drake. Her grandmother came to our church, and I presided over her sister's wedding. Cori Bartel's team got silver in curling during the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver BC. I got to touch the medal and even I felt inspired to try my hand at curling.

Just as watching a sports hero inspires us to emulate their skills, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection inspire us to live as he did. His example prompts us to repent and change our lives.

Matthew 25:37-40; 1 John 3:4-16

This form of atonement emphasizes salvation as not just forgiveness but also transformation—and inspiration into a new way of living.

Let's sing a Moral influence hymn: *God is here among us.* 62 VT

We are not all the same. Even in this congregation we can differ in which theory we prefer. But each view of Jesus' saving actions is not better or worse than the other. They're just different. And they are all biblical and each reflects God's forgiveness of our sins as well as God's great love for us. Each of these perspectives offers a unique lens through which to view God's saving work through his death and resurrection. And when brought together, we can begin to see a broader picture of Christ's saving work. Christ is a sacrifice and pays the penalty on our behalf. By breaking the power of sin and death, Christ conquers the powers of evil and death. By opening the way to new life, Christ shows God's love, inspiring us to receive that love and love God and others in return.

Or we could say it this way:

In the life of Jesus, God demonstrates great love that inspires us and calls us to live like Jesus. In the death of Jesus, God takes the penalty for our sin so that we can experience forgiveness. In the resurrection of Jesus, God triumphs over sin and death and grants us the power to live a new life.

Thanks be to God for the Good News of Salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.