

THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT – These are the six best known theories. Some are clearly more Biblical than others. Many wonder why God didn't just forgive everyone outright, without requiring a sacrifice. These theories attempt to explain why a sacrifice was necessary.

1. **Moral Theory** – Jesus gave us a perfect moral example of how to live to inspire humans out of sin into communion with God. It draws attention to Jesus' life and teachings but fails to really adequately explain the crucifixion.
2. **Ransom Theory** – Mark 10:45: Jesus gave his life as a RANSOM for many. This is an old theory attributed to Origen. The disobedience of Adam and Eve caused God to abandon humankind to Satan who exerted power over humans. Later, God decided to pay Satan a ransom for our release and Jesus' death was the payment. We were released from Satan's power but God tricked him by raising Jesus.
3. **Satisfaction (Debt) Theory** – 11th century Anselm did not like the Ransom theory as he believed the Devil had no right to exert power over humanity and nothing should be paid to him. Our debt is owed to God because we dishonored him through our disobedience and sin. Jesus volunteered to pay out debt for us by suffering and dying on the cross. God accepted this as a full atonement and was satisfied, then forgave us by offering us salvation.
4. **Governmental Theory** – God is a governor of all life. He became displeased at human behavior and he wanted to show us the punishment we deserved. Through this God hoped we would realize the seriousness of our sins and reform ourselves. He could have punished us, but decided to give us a warning. Many are unaware of this warning.
5. **Christus Victor Theory** – Lutheran Gustaf Aulen: 1931 Jesus came to earth to defeat the forces that had gained control over us. Jesus needed to overcome Satan and death. Jesus defeated the Evil One and his resurrection proved that death can also be conquered. Popular among many evangelicals.
6. **Penal Substitution Theory** – There is value found in Satisfaction, Governmental Theory, and Christus Victor Theory. Here Jesus suffered and died to take upon himself the punishment that we deserved. God accepted the punishment of Jesus as a substitute for our punishment. The Reformers embraced this approach building on the Satisfaction approach. It is also considered a Retributive/Punitive approach. John Stott said it is not a theory of the atonement but is the essence of the atonement.

How are humans reconciled to God due to the alienation caused by humankind's sins? Isaiah 53 clearly teaches a Penal Substitution Theory in conjunction with 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body upon the tree."