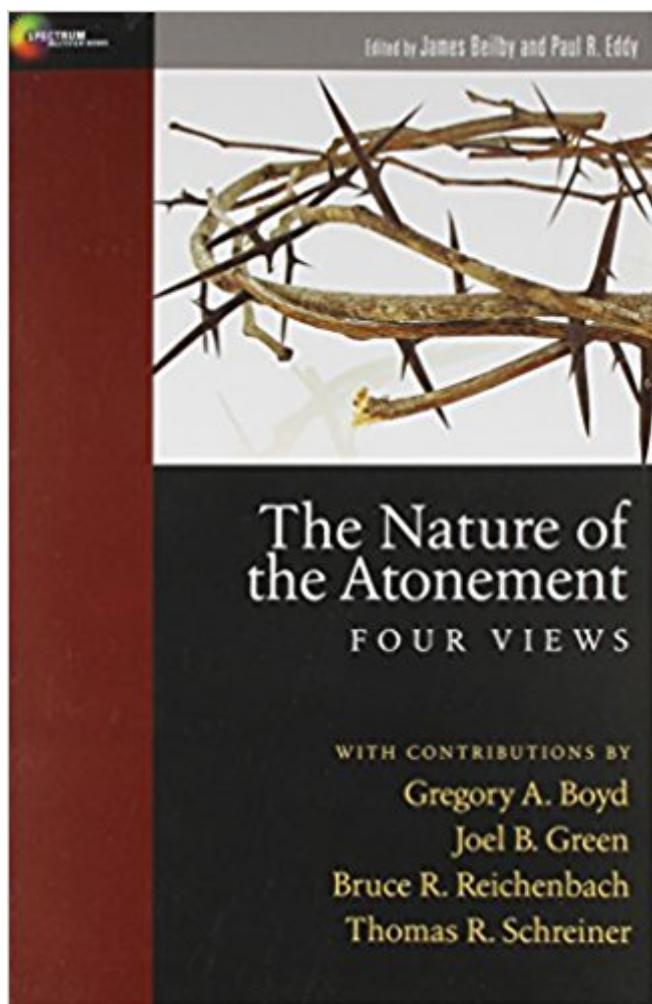


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# The Nature Of The Atonement: Four Views



## **Synopsis**

A long history of biblical exegesis and theological reflection has shaped our understanding of the atonement today. The more prominent highlights of this history have acquired familiar names for the household of faith: Christus Victor, penal substitutionary, subjective, and governmental. Recently the penal substitutionary view, and particularly its misappropriations, has been critiqued, and a lively debate has taken hold within evangelicalism. This book offers a "panel" discussion of four views of atonement maintained by four evangelical scholars. The proponents and their views are: Gregory A. Boyd: Christus Victor view Joel B. Green: Kaleidescopic view Bruce R. Reichenbach: Healing view Thomas R. Schreiner: Penal Substitutionary view Following an introduction written by the editors, each participant first puts forth the case for their view. Each view is followed by responses from the other three participants, noting points of agreement as well as disagreement. This is a book that will help Christians understand the issues, grasp the differences and proceed toward a clearer articulation of their understanding of the atonement.

## **Book Information**

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"The directness of the responses is a strength of the book. It serves to highlight differences, expose weak points, and provide the reader with questions and issues to pursue. The book makes a positive contribution both through highlighting the diversity of thinking about the atonement within evangelicalism and through encouraging discussion about this diversity." (Mark D. Baker, Religious Studies Review, March 2010)"One strength of this study is its multifaceted scope. The book

presents four views side by side and allows the reader quickly to see what the primary differences and similarities are between the various positions. By including defenses of positions by those who hold to these divergent views, this volume adds a valuable dimension to the evangelical discussion on the issue of the atonement." (Ched Spellman on Says Simpleton, April 11, 2008)"Those looking for evangelical and scripturally founded treatments of the atonement will find this book a lively register of current opinions." (Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 2007)"There are a number of reasons to applaud The Nature of the Atonement, not least its provocative and illuminating presentation. . . . If you are looking for a more focused discussion on the atonement--that is, in terms of today's evangelical milieu, The Nature of the Atonement can certainly serve as a fine forum for exploring essential matters of the Christian faith." (Kathleen Borres, Catholic Books Review, <http://catholicbooksreview.org/2006/beilby.htm>)

James K. Beilby (Ph.D., Marquette University) is professor of systematic and philosophical theology at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. His books include Why Bother With Truth? (with David Clark), Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views and The Meaning of the Atonement: Four Views (both with Paul Eddy), Naturalism Defeated?, For Faith and Clarity and Epistemology as Theology. His articles and essays have appeared in such publications as Faith and Philosophy, Philosophia Christi, Religious Studies, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, American Journal of Theology and Philosophy, Sophia and Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.Paul R. Eddy (Ph.D., Marquette University) is Professor of Theology at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. His books include John Hick's Pluralist Philosophy of World Religions (Ashgate), Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology (with G. A. Boyd, Baker) and Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views (with James Beilby IVP).Gregory A. Boyd (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary) is a pastor at Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. Previously, he was a professor of theology at Bethel University, also in St. Paul. His books include Recovering the Real Jesus in an Age of Revisionist Replies, Letters from a Skeptic, God of the Possible, Repenting of Religion, Seeing is Believing, Escaping the Matrix, The Jesus Legend, Myth of a Christian Nation, Is God to Blame, God at War and Satan and the Problem of Evil.Joel B. Green (B.S., M.Th., Ph.D.) is professor of New Testament interpretation, Fuller Theological Seminary. He was vice president of academic affairs, provost and professor of New Testament interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Prior to his appointment at Asbury in 1997, he was associate professor of New Testament at the American Baptist Seminary of the West/Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. His books include What about the Soul? Neuroscience and Christian

Anthropology (Abingdon, 2004); Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: The Recovery of Narrative and Preaching the New Testament (Baker, 2003); Salvation (Chalice, 2003); Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology (with Paul Achtemeier and Marianne Meye Thompson, 2001); Beginning with Jesus: Christ in Scripture, the Church and Discipleship (2000); Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts (with Mark Baker, 2000); Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology (with Max Turner, 2000) and The Gospel of Luke in the New International Commentary on the New Testament (1997). For over 20 years, Green has been the editor of Catalyst, a journal providing evangelical resources and perspectives to United Methodist seminarians. An ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, he has pastored churches in Texas, Scotland and Northern California. He has also served on the boards of Berkeley Emergency Food and Housing Project, and RADIX magazine. Bruce R. Reichenbach (Ph.D. Northwestern University) is a professor of philosophy at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He has also been a visiting professor at Juniata College, Daystar University in Kenya and Morija Theological Seminary in Lesotho. He is the author or coauthor of a number books, including Introduction to Critical Thinking, On Behalf of God: A Christian Ethic for Biology (coauthored with V. Elving Anderson) and Evil and a Good God. Thomas R. Schreiner is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation and associate dean at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. His other books include The Law and Its Fulfillment, Interpreting the Pauline Epistles and Romans.

In Bible College and Seminary I was taught the various views of the atonement. I remember hearing about the ransom theory, the satisfaction theory, the moral government theory, and the penal substitution substitution theory, and the example theory, but for some reason, I don't ever remember learning about the Christus Victor view. I went back and looked at my notes, and sure enough, not a word was said about it. I am trying to figure out why. Was it because my professors didn't know about it? Or possibly they did know about it, but didn't think it was worth mentioning. Either way, it kind of ticks me off, because after reading this book, I believe that the Christus Victor view is correct. Why did nobody ever at least mention it or bring it up in class? Oh well, I've learned about it now, thanks to this excellent book edited by Jamed Beilby and Paul Eddy. This book presents four views on the atonement (which are not all the possible views). The introduction points out that there are three main paradigms that guide atonement perspectives. The first paradigm is the Christus Victor paradigm, which is Satanward in its approach so that Jesus is seen to be fighting against and triumphing over the devil and his works. The second paradigm is Godward in its focus so that the

work of Christ on the cross is said to satisfy or appease something within the nature and character of God. The third paradigm is manward in focus so that the work of Christ is thought to accomplish something for humanity. All of the various theories about the atonement fall into one of these paradigms, and this book chose four theories to consider. This, of course, is the main weakness of this book (and all "Four View" books), for the reader may not recognize that there are more than four views on the atonement. Regardless, the four views chosen were as follows. The Christus Victor view, explained and defended by Gregory Boyd, essentially sees that Jesus came to destroy the devil's work. The Penal Substitution view, explained and defended by Thomas Schreiner, argues that sin has a penalty, and on the cross, Jesus bore that penalty for all mankind. The Healing view, explained and defended by Bruce Reichenbach, says that the cross of Christ was intended to restore all creation and relationships to their rightful role within God's design. Finally, the Kaleidoscopic view, explained and defended by Joel Green, argues that on the cross, Jesus did something significant within each of the three paradigms listed above. The reason I ended up siding with the Christus Victor view is because of how it presents God in light of Jesus Christ. Jesus reveals the Father to us, and in Jesus we do not see a God who is out to get us, who is just waiting to pounce on every sin, and who must exact bloody revenge for every slight against His holy character. And while it is certainly true that there are negative consequences for sin, and far-reaching implications for restoration and liberation within the cross of Christ for all mankind, the central reason Jesus went to the cross, it seems, is because Satan demanded it, and in so doing, Jesus defeated and triumphed over the devil. It is not God who is bloodthirsty and legalistic, but Satan. It is not the wrath of God that must be appeased, but the wrath of the law by which Satan screams for justice! So Jesus gave Satan "justice" and in so doing, destroyed the devil's works. I am certain I am explaining this poorly, but then, I just now learned of this view!

Good overview.

Lives up to the description. Most protestants are only familiar with one view of the atonement, but this is an excellent corrective. A must read for any believer who wants to be educated in the faith.

The ecumenical creeds of the Christian church never settled on one theory of Christ's atonement. Therefore, history shows a wide variety of views on how Christ's death on the cross accomplishes human salvation. The Nature of the Atonement includes contributions from well-known evangelical scholars that encompass the different views of atonement theology. The first three contributors

argue that their model of the atonement best explains the bulk of Scriptural testimony and best fits the other views into their own. The last contributor argues that there is no overarching view of the atonement that takes into account all the others. Greg Boyd presents the Christus Victor view - that the atonement was primarily about God's defeat of the devil. Tom Schreiner presents the penal substitutionary view - that the atonement was primarily about Jesus absorbing the wrath of God against human sin and thus providing forgiveness and restoration by taking our punishment. Bruce Reichenbach presents the healing view - that Jesus took the poison and sickness of our sin and brought healing and wholeness through his death. Joel Green presents the kaleidoscopic view - that no one theory of the atonement is adequate and that each has its place. For me, the chapter on the healing view was enlightening. I had missed some of the parallels between sin and sickness, and Reichenbach's presentation helped illuminate some of the biblical texts that I had unintentionally screened out. Boyd's Christus Victor presentation is not nearly as compelling as other versions of this theory I have come across. Schreiner does well in presenting the penal substitutionary model, although I'm not sure what he means by stating that this model is at the "heart" of the atonement. Just what is the "heart?" And what significance does that carry? Of course, I affirm penal substitution as an integral part of Christ's work. I was not convinced, however, that this is the central motif of the atonement throughout all Scripture. It is disappointing that Green's kaleidoscopic view leaves room for all theories of the atonement except for penal substitution. Green's view is not quite as inclusive as it first appears. Everything but penal substitution has its place. The Nature of the Atonement is a helpful introduction to the theories of the atonement. The contributors do an admirable job presenting and defending their views.

Excellent read

good read

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