

AlbertMohler.com

Theories of the Atonement — Dever Defends Substitution

Monday, April 17, 2006

Writing in *Christianity Today*, [Mark Dever](#), pastor of [Capitol Hill Baptist Church](#) in Washington, DC, offers an important defense of the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement. His article is convictionally clear, balanced in tone, and very helpful.

His conclusion:

I don't doubt that we have more to learn from Christ's death than simply the fact that he died as a substitute for us, bearing our grief and carrying our sorrows (Isa. 53:4). Peter, for instance, teaches that we should follow Christ's example of suffering for that which is good (1 Pet. 3). Any biblical understanding of the Atonement must take into account our having been united to Christ by faith, adopted and regenerated in him. As those who belong to him, as his temple and his body, we expect the fruit of his Spirit to be evident in us. Because of the Atonement, we expect a new quality to our lives (Rom. 6; 2 Cor. 5; Gal. 5; 2 Pet. 1). The Atonement is not merely moral influence, but it surely results in moral improvement.

Rather than pitting these theories against one another, couldn't they be evaluated together? A Christ who wins victory over the powers of evil, whose death changes us, and whose death propitiates God is not only conceivable, he seems to be the Bible's composite presentation. . . .

Still, when we give attention and authority to all parts of the New Testament canon, substitution becomes the center and focus of the Bible's witness to the meaning of Christ's death, and the measure of God's redeeming love. As New Testament theologian George Eldon Ladd said, "The objective and substitutionary character of the death of Christ as the supreme demonstration of God's love should result in a transformation of conduct that is effected by the constraining power of that love." Theologian Donald Bloesch is in line with this when he insists: "Evangelical theology affirms the vicarious, substitutionary Atonement of Jesus Christ. It does not claim that this theory does justice to all aspects of Christ's atoning work, but it does see substitution as the heart of the Atonement."

Content Copyright © 2002-2010, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

