

What implications does the Christus Victor view of the Atonement have for Christian ministry today?

By Jason Strange, 27 March 2025

Gregory Boyd provides the following summary from his most excellent chapter, entitled 'Christus Victor View.'

"The Christus Victor motif is the one model of the atonement that makes the call to resist the powers and imitate Christ...it is arguably a kingdom necessity." (2006, p.49)

It implies that victory in Christ should be individually experienced. Therefore, ministry should teach that Christ's victory can be seized, reiterated and benefited by any believer who utilises the Holy Spirit. Christ's mandate means defeat to the works of the devil and his cohorts. Curses or condemnation (Rom 8:1-3; Gal 3:13) and recriminations from sin (John 8:34) can be significantly neutralised by emulating Christ as his disciples.

John Wimber modelled this Atonement view by saying, "Through healing the sick Jesus defeated Satan and demonstrated his rule" (1987, p.36).

However, though Christ defeated these powers, we still await their final destruction. They remain a continual and pesky threat to the Christian, resulting in life struggles and conflicts: the so-called "fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12)

We live in this tension, resisting sin and carnality: dependent on divine interventions to get us through. Ironically, Rowan Williams describes it beautifully:

"The new humanity that is created around Jesus is not a humanity that is always going to be successful and in control of things, but a humanity that can reach out its hand from the depths of chaos, to be touched by the hand of God." (2014, p.10)

Knowing how chaotic individual lives are, the intended victory should extend through the church's life, community and mission. It should presuppose healing the sick, preaching the gospel and deliverance ministry. The church should convey the ministry of victory as it frees those oppressed by evil spirits. (Luke 4:18, 19).

Just as Acts records the disciples continuing this commission, today's church must embody Christus Victor, transcending all spirit dimensions.

Arguably, the reality of church ministry today falls well short of Christ's original victorious intent. Perhaps the operational environment is to blame for this malaise? Have we created paradigms where only success, studiousness and dutifulness get celebrated? Does this restrict the full vanquishment of the cross from probing our weaknesses and failure, ideally the veridical battleground?

Bonhoeffer says it best,

"The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus...The psychiatrist views me as if there were no God. The brother views me as I am before the judging and merciful God in the Cross of Jesus Christ." (2004, p.115)

The church appears to have several pertinent doctrinal crossroads in this post-modern era. There is a renaissance in academia towards re-reading atonement theory within the Church fathers, for example, the work by Gillian Evans and Alistair McGrath on Anselm.

Such re-reading may or may not result in ministerial reforms.

However, I suggest the implications for Christus Victor must also be reimagined to connect Atonement's intended benefits - with the reality of God's promises for our lives. The numerical levels of non-church attendance could be a factor in why this is not happening, even if some profess to draw on church resources, albeit notionally.

Bibliography

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