

The Calvin Symposium on Worship
January 24-26, 2008

B-23

Imagine... What Has Christ Done for Us?

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Images of the Atonement

(Deep gratitude to John Witvliet for these!)

1. An Image from War: *Christus Victor*

- ¹³And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵**He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.** (Colossians 2:13-15)
- **“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”** “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who **gives us the victory** through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55-57)
- ⁵Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” (Revelation 5:5)

2. An Image from a Detective Novel: Ransom

- ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and **to give his life a ransom for many.**” (Mark 10:45)
- Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰**For you were bought with a price;** therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 16:19-20)
- “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and **by your blood you ransomed for God** saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

3. An Image from a Courtroom: Penal Satisfaction (Substitution, Vicarious)

- For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵**And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them...** ²¹For our sake **he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** (1 Corinthians 5:14, 15, 21)
- ²³When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. ²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.(1 Peter 2:23-24)
- ²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, **to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.** (John 15:12-13)
- Also Isaiah 53:6, John 11:49-50, Romans 4:25

4. An Image from Religious Ritual: Sacrifice (blood imagery)

- For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as **a sacrifice of atonement by his blood**, effective through faith. (Romans 3:23-25)
- ⁷ In him **we have redemption through his blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. (Ephesians 1:7-8)
- Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:2)
- Also Romans 5:9, Ephesians 2:13, Col. 1:20, Leviticus... Hebrews 9:6-15, 10:5-18

5. An Image from Obedience School: Moral Influence/Example

- ²¹ For to this you have been called, because **Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.** (1 Peter 2:21)
- ³ Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; ⁵ but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says, "**I abide in him,**" **ought to walk just as he walked.** (1 John 2:6)

A Sampling of Hymns

1. Christus Victor

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" (PsH 341:3)

Rank on rank the host of heaven stream before him on the way,
as the Light of Light, descending from the realms of endless day,
comes, the powers of hell to vanquish, clears the gloom of hell away.

"Lift High the Cross" (PsH 373:1, 7)

"Come, Christians, follow where our Savior led,
our King victorious, Jesus Christ, our head."

So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory!

"Ride On, Ride On in Majesty" (PsH 382:2, 3)

Ride on, ride on in majesty, the lowly pomp ride on to die;
O Christ, your triumph now begin o'er captive death and conquered sin!

Ride on, ride on in majesty, **the last and fiercest foe defy;**
the Father on his sapphire throne awaits his own anointed Son.

"Alleluia! Alleluia!" (PsH 387:2)

Alleluia, Christ is risen! **Death at last has met defeat.**
See the ancient powers of evil in confusion and retreat...

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (PsH 469:2)

... You ask you that may be? Christ Jesus it is he; **Lord Sabaoth his name,**
from age to age the same; and **he must win the battle.**

2. Ransom

“And Can It Be” (PsH 267:3)

Long my imprisoned spirit lay fast bound in sin and nature’s night.
Your sunrise turned that night to day; I woke—**the dungeon flamed with light!**
My chains fell off, your voice I knew; I rose, went out, and followed you.

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” (PsH 329:1)

Come, thou long-expected Jesus, **born to set thy people free;**
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.

“Hark, the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes” (PsH 335:2)

He comes the prisoners to release, in Satan’s bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst, the iron fetters yield.

“No Weight of Gold or Silver” (PsH 374:1)

No weight of gold or silver can measure human worth;
no soul secures its ransom with all the wealth of earth;
no sinners find their freedom but by the gift unpriced:
the Lamb of God unblemished, the precious blood of Christ.

“When Israel Was In Egypt’s Land” (PsH 476:5)

Lord, help us all from bondage flee, Let my people go.
and let us all in Christ be free, Let my people go.

3. Penal Substitution

“We Come, O Christ, to You” (PsH 238:2)

You are the way to God, your blood our ransom paid;
in you we face our Judge and Maker unafraid.

**Before the throne absolved we stand;
your love has met your law's demand.**

"Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding" (PsH 332)

See, the Lamb so long expected **comes with pardon down from heaven.**
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all, **to be forgiven.**

"The King of Glory Comes" (PsH 370:3)

He gave his life for us, the pledge of salvation;
he took upon himself the sin of the nations.

"Before the Throne of God Above" (Charitie L. Bancroft)

When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died my sinful soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.

Alleluia, Alleluia! Give Thanks (PsH 402:3, 4)

We have been crucified with Christ;
now we shall live forever.

God has proclaimed the just reward:
life for his own. Alleluia!

4. Sacrifice

"God, Be Merciful to Me" (PsH 255:1)

God, be merciful to me; on your grace I rest my plea.
My transgressions I confess; grief and guilt my soul oppress.
Wash me, make me pure within; cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

"Not What My Hands Have Done" (PsH 260:2)

Your voice alone, O Lord, can speak to me of grace;
your power alone, O Son of God, can all my sin erase.
No other work but yours, no other blood will do;
no strength but which is divine can bear me safely through.

"Just as I Am, without One Plea" (PsH 263:2)

Just has I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

“Go to Dark Gethsemane” (PsH 381:3)

Calvary’s mournful mountain climb; there, adoring at his feet,
mark the miracle of time, **God’s own sacrifice complete:**
“It is finished!” hear him cry—save us, Lord, when death draws nigh.

“The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power” (PsH 552:1)

The blood that Jesus shed for me way back on Calvary,
the blood that gives strength from day to day—it will never lose it power.

5. Example

“My Faith Looks Up to Thee” (PsH 262:2)

May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart, my zeal inspire.
**As thou hast died for me. O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire!**

“May the Mind of Christ My Savior” (PsH 291:5)

May we run the race before us, strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus as we onward go.

“Come and Stand Amazed” (PsH 338:3)

O Lord Jesus, God incarnate, who assumed this humble form,
counsel me and let my wishes to your perfect will conform.
Light of life, dispel my darkness, let your frailty strengthen me;
let your meekness give me boldness, let your burden set me free.;
let your sadness give me gladness, let your death be life for me.

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (PsH 384:4)

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

“Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (PsH 601:refrain, 1)

Jesu, Jesu, fill Us with your love, show us how to serve
the neighbors we have from you.

Kneels at the feet of his friends, silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.

6. Multiple Images

“I Will Sing of My Redeemer” (PsH 479:1,2)

I will sing of my Redeemer and his wondrous love to me;
on the cruel cross he suffered, from the curse to set me free.
Sing, O sing of my Redeemer! **With his blood he purchased me;**
on the cross he sealed my pardon, paid the debts, and made me free.

I will tell the wondrous story, how my lost estate to save,
in his boundless love and mercy, **he the ransom freely gave.**
I will praise my dear Redeemer, **his triumphant power** I'll tell:
how the victory he give me over sin and death and hell.

“Praise the Savior Now and Ever” (PsH 400:1-3)

Praise the Savior now and ever; praise him, all beneath the skies;
self denying, suffering, dying, on the cross a sacrifice.
Victory gaining, life obtaining, now in glory he doth rise.

Our work faileth, Christ's availeth; **he is all our righteousness.**
He, our Savior, has forever **set us free from dire distress.**
Through his merit we inherit light and peace and happiness.

Sin's bonds severed, we're delivered; Christ has crushed the serpent's head.
Death no longer is the stronger; hell itself is captive led.
Christ has risen from death's prison; o'er the tomb he light has shed.

“O, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (PsH 501:4)

“He breaks the power of canceled sin, he sets the prisoner free;
his blood can make the foulest clean; his blood avails for me”

Planning with an Image in Mind

One way of planning the service of confession and assurance is to keep in mind an image of the atonement. The following five images can be a catalyst for our words of confession and offer a means by which we might experience the assurance of salvation. Included is a brief explanation of the image, words that might direct a prayer of confession, and a possible title for the words of assurance that resonate with the image.

7. Christus Victor

Jesus Christ defeated Satan and the power of death.

Words of Confession:

We feel defeated in our struggle against sin and the powers of darkness...

Title: Assurance of Victory

8. **Ransom**

When Christ died on the cross his death paid the debt of our accumulated sins and freed us from the slavery and prison of sin.

Words of Confession:

Our sin imprisons us, we are chained to disobedience, and there is no end to our sinning...

Title: Assurance of Freedom

9. **Penal Substitution**

Jesus though innocent was found guilty while we who were guilty are found innocent.

Words of Confession:

Our sins are a burden and our guilt is too heavy to bear...

Title: Assurance of Pardon

10. **Sacrifice**

The blood of Christ washes away all our sins and makes us holy.

Words of Confession:

Our sins have made us dirty, filthy...

Title: Assurance of Holiness

11. **Example***

Christ's life and death was an example of love and self-sacrifice for us to follow.

Words of Confession:

We have followed the example of the world and turned from your ways...

Title: Assurance of Faithfulness

**Though this image captures an aspect of Christ's saving work, alone it can lead to moralizing. Use this image to consider words of confession and to shape the response to grace. In addition, we ought to*

provide the promise of God's initiative and faithfulness to save us and lead us in Christ's example (e.g. Phil 1:6; Hebrews 13:20-21; Jude 24-25).

Sample Service of Confession & Assurance

Example & Substitution

Call to Confession: Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²**looking to Jesus** the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Sung Prayer of Confession: "My Jesus I Love Thee" (st. 1)

My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;
for thee all the follies of sin I resign;
my gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou;
if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

Prayer of Confession:

Almighty and loving God,
in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ,
the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
we confess the sin that so easily clings
and the foolishness that accompanies our way.
We have been slow to love our neighbor,
inactive in the ways of justice and truth,
and have displayed little ambition for your glory and kingdom.
We have preferred comfort and ease,
self-improvement, and private satisfaction,
**acquainting ourselves with the pleasures of this world
rather than the sufferings of your Son.**
Forgive us, we pray, for what we have left undone,
restore us to the path of righteousness,
and grant us the wisdom and strength **to follow in the steps of Jesus.**
By your Spirit quicken our minds,
ready our hands, and rouse our passions
to lay aside our selfish ways
and run the race you have set before us.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sung Prayer of Confession: : "My Jesus I Love Thee" (st. 2)

I love thee because thou hast first loved me
and **purchased my pardon** on Calvary's tree;
I love thee for wearing the thorns on thy brow;
if ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.

Words of Assurance: 1 Peter 2:24a

**[Jesus] himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,
so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness**