



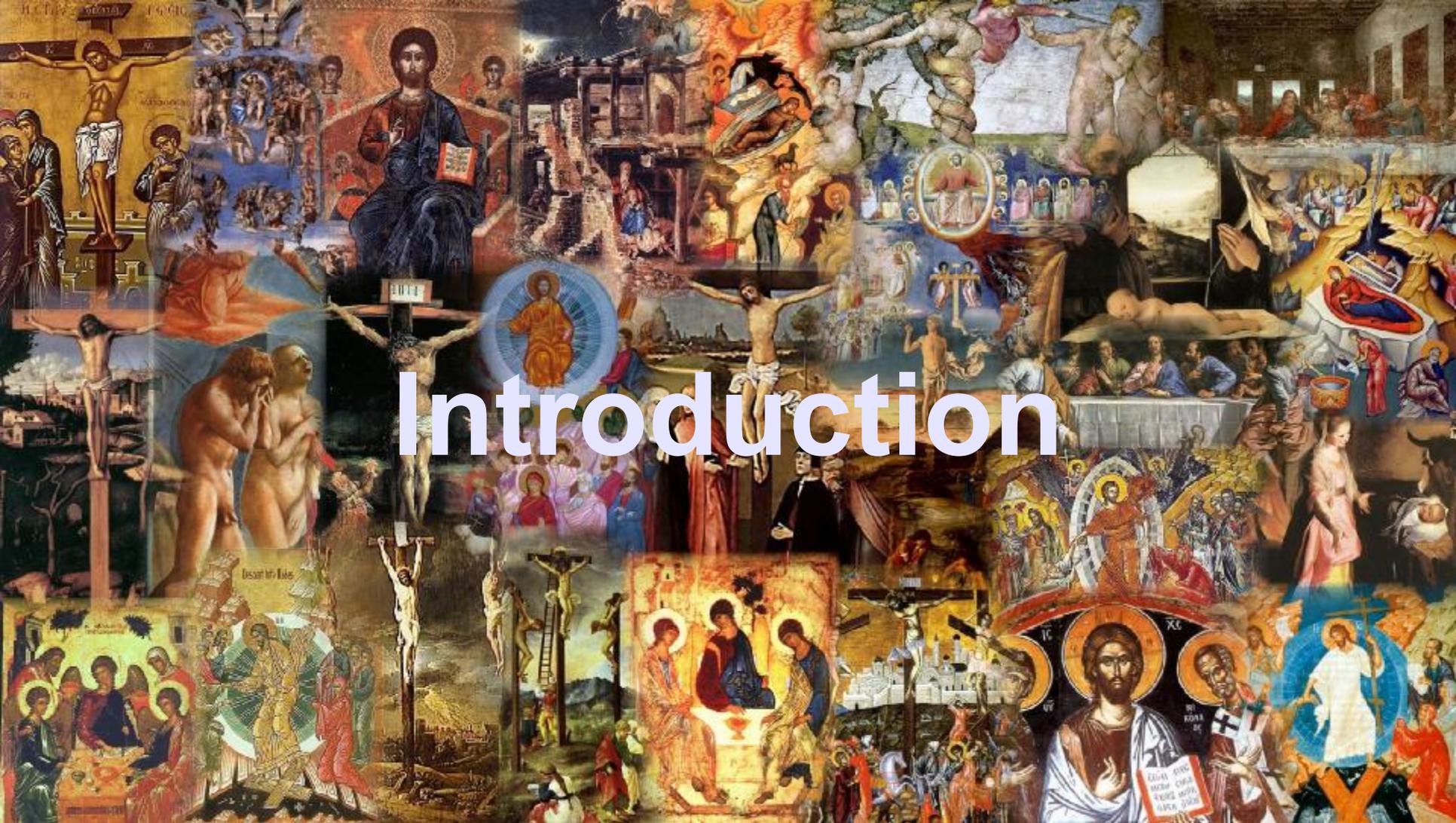
# How Are We Saved?

## 4. Theories of At-One-ment

*St. John in the Wilderness*

■ O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire you with a whole heart, that so desiring you we may seek you and find you; and so finding you, may love you; and loving you, may hate those sins from which you have redeemed us, for Jesus Christ's sake.

■ Anselm, 1033-1109



# Introduction

# Introduction

- So far, in discussing:
  - grace vs. free will. Faith (Session 2)
  - justification and sanctification (Session 3)
- we been focusing on *our response to Jesus' saving work*.
- Today we ask the question: just what was **Jesus' saving work**? What exactly did Jesus do to save us? ■

# Introduction

- Unlike the very detailed doctrines on the nature of Jesus formulated in the early centuries of the church, there are no similarly detailed doctrines on exactly what **Jesus's saving work** was, no detailed doctrines on what Jesus actually did to save us. ■

# Introduction

- All Christians from every tradition would agree on this: **Jesus Christ provides salvation for the world (humanity) by his life, death and resurrection.**
- Beyond that, there is no consensus, no uniformly accepted doctrines. ■

# Introduction

- We will first look at theories of "atonement" influential and prominent in Western Christianity.
  - **atonement** = literally **At-One-ment**; how are human beings made "at-one" or reconciled to God
- Then we will look at how Eastern Christianity views Jesus' saving work.
  - In general, Eastern Christianity has been more reluctant than the West to try to find precise explanations of Jesus' saving work, preferring to maintain a greater degree of mystery about Jesus' saving work. ■



# The Ransom Theory of Atonement

# Ransom Theory of Atonement

- The earliest theory or model of atonement in Christian history was the so-called **Ransom theory**.
- This theory is of only of historical interest; it has no proponents today.
- Some echoes of it can be found in the **Christus Victor theory** of Martin Luther and the modern Lutheran theologian Gustav Aulen. ■

# Ransom Theory of Atonement

- The **Ransom Theory** proposed:
  - Through the "original sin", Adam and Eve voluntarily put themselves and all their offspring under the legal control of Satan.
    - Some church fathers suggested Satan got his control of human beings by an act of unjust aggression.
  - God (being God) dealt justly with Satan: God offered to make a deal with Satan. ■

# Ransom Theory of Atonement

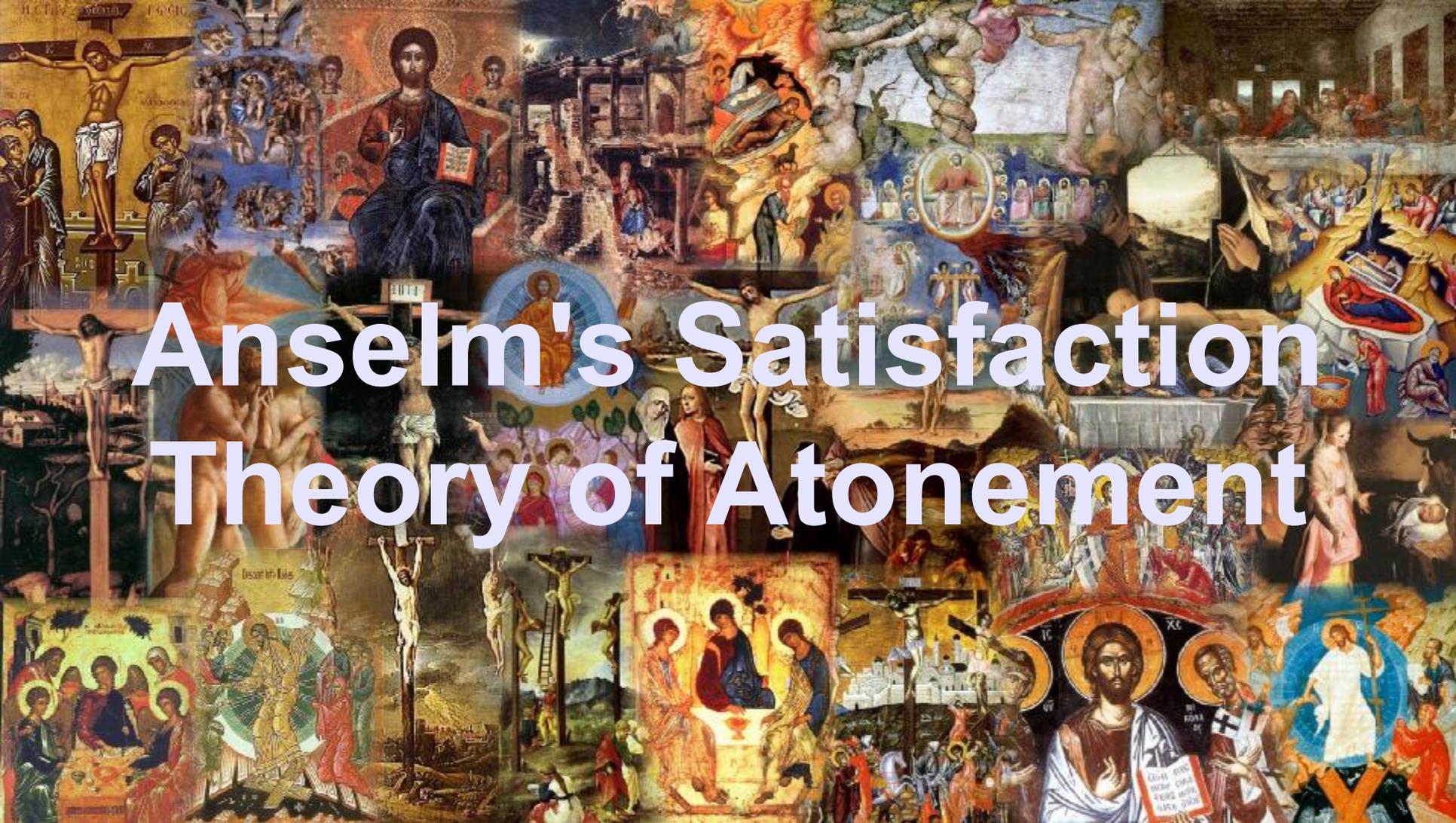
- The **Ransom Theory** proposed:
  - Satan demanded as ransom for human beings the blood of God's Son Jesus Christ, perceiving this a much greater prize than the human beings under his power.
  - God agreed to make this ransom payment in exchange for getting back his beloved human creatures from Satan. ■

# Ransom Theory of Atonement

- Some of the church fathers suggested Jesus survived and won through a bit of a trick on the devil:
  - **Gregory of Nyssa** (d. 395) suggested Jesus divinity was so well "hidden" under his humanity that the over confident devil seized the human Jesus and killed him (a "big creature fish" swallowing a "little creature fish"), not realizing that hidden inside that "little creature fish" was the all-almighty divinity of God.
  - Gregory of Nyssa: "The Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh." ■

# Ransom Theory of Atonement

- Satan swallowed the bait, exchanging control over the rest of the human race for Christ.
- But when Christ rose from the dead through the power of his divinity, the devil was overcome.
- This theory was popular during the early centuries of the church, although not everyone liked it.
  - **Gregory of Nazianzus** (329-391), among others, rejected its notion of God dealing with Satan as blasphemous. ■



# Satisfaction Theory

- **Anselm of Canterbury** (1033/34-1109) also disliked the **Ransom theory**, and proposed an alternative theory, **The Satisfaction theory of Atonement**.
- The Satisfaction Theory, along with its variant, **The Substitutionary Punishment Theory** or **Penal Substitution Theory**, is probably the most influential theory around today in Western Christianity. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- Anselm's laid out his theory as a *series of logical steps*, and tried to show -- to prove --- that
  - God taking on human form in Jesus, and
  - Jesus' death on the cross
- was all *logically necessary*. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- Anselm lived in a feudal society in which the overlord is responsible for maintaining order and justice.
- Justice in such a society required honoring the overlord and paying him the homily due his lofty position.
- Anselm suggested the position of human beings to God was similar to the position of vassals to their overlord in the feudal society of his day. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- When we sin, we offend God (our overlord) by not rendering to God the honor God is due.
- As a result, we owe God a "debt" of honor.
- Furthermore, since God is an infinite being (a very lofty overlord indeed), our offence is infinite, and the debt we owe is infinite.
- This is a problem, for we as finite creatures, we have no means to pay back an infinite debt. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- Anselm considers three options open to God:
- *First option*: simply forgive the debt of honor we owe out of sheer mercy.
  - After all, Jesus tells us to forgive our neighbor again and again, shouldn't God also generously forgive?
- Anselm says God ruled out this possibility:
  - God has built a structure of justice into creation, without which life as a creature would be meaningless.
  - God -- precisely for the sake of his creatures -- must uphold this built-in moral order in the universe. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- *Second option*: punish the sinful human beings.
- Anselm says God also rejected this option, because the punishment human beings deserved for their sins is so great that they would all be completely destroyed.
  - Some theologians since Anselm have suggested God rejected this option out of love for humanity.
  - Anselm, wanting to make it logically necessary, suggested God rejected it because God *needed* to save at least some human beings to replace the fallen angels. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- *Third option*: demand a "satisfaction" for God's offended honor.
- In Anselm's day, if a vassal dishonored his overlord by betraying him in some way, he owed the overlord a "satisfaction" — a debt of some kind.
- This "satisfaction" could be paid by the offending vassal, or another vassal. But *a satisfaction had to be paid*.
- Anselm suggested God (by logical necessity), chose this third option. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- *The problem:* the satisfaction required was infinite, but:
  - Only God could supply an infinite satisfaction.
  - Only a human being could pay the satisfaction.
  - Yet in order to uphold cosmic justice and order, God absolutely had to receive a payment of satisfaction. ■

# Satisfaction Theory

- The logically necessary solution:
  - God had to become a human being (in the form of Jesus), and
  - through the life and death of Jesus, pay the debt of satisfaction owed by humanity to their overlord, God. ■



# Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment Theory of the Atonement

# Substitutionary Punishment

- The **Substitutionary Punishment Theory of the Atonement** or the **Penal Substitution Theory** is a *modification* of the Anselm Satisfaction theory made by **John Calvin** (1509-1564).
  - Some texts say they are basically the same theory.
  - Other texts try to make a distinction between them. ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- Recall Anselm suggested God had three choices to remedy the offence of our sins against the infinite God.
  - 1. forgive out of sheer mercy
  - 2. punish
  - 3. demand satisfaction.
- Anselm suggested God chose #3 (demand satisfaction).
- Calvin suggested God chose #2 (punish). ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- Now Anselm thought because our sins are an offense against the infinite God, our deserved punishment (infinite) would destroy us.
- Calvin suggested that:
  - God became human in Jesus, and
  - in suffering and dying on the cross, Jesus bore the infinite punishment we deserved for our sins.
- That is: instead of Jesus paying "satisfaction" in his suffering and death on the cross, *Jesus was bearing for us the punishment we deserved for our sins.* ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- Is there a real substantive difference between the **Anselm's Satisfaction theory** and **Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment Theory**?
- That is: is there a substantive difference between:
  - *receiving punishment* vs.
  - *providing satisfaction*? ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- If there is a meaningful difference, one way of looking at it might be following:
- You have run a red-light and totaled someone's Porsche.
- *What does justice demand?* ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- *What does justice demand?*
- Anselm: the owner of the Porsche has lost their beloved mode of transportation.
- They are "due" the satisfaction, the compensation of a new Porsche, or the equivalent in monetary funds to remedy the deprivation you have caused them.
- If you cannot afford to buy them a new Porsche, their need for "satisfaction" can still fully be met if your friend next store volunteers to buy them a new Porsche. ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- *What does justice demand?*
- Calvin: you broke the law running the red-light, and you broke the law in damaging the property of another person.
- Justice demands that you be thrown in jail and punished for your breaking of the law. ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

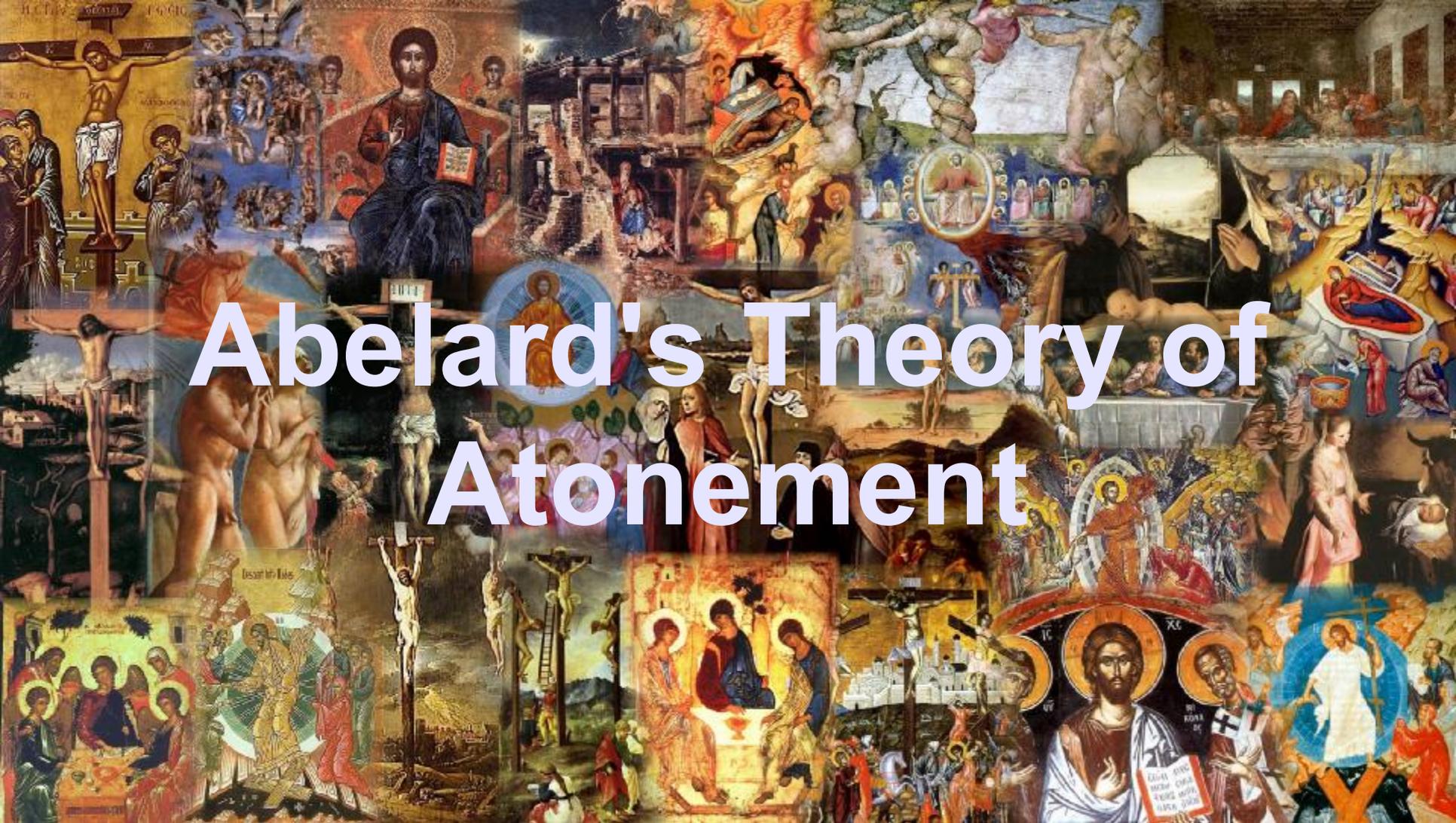
- Calvin's answer to "What does justice demand?" is a more retributive view of justice.
- Sin is understood:
  - not so much as offending the honor of God,
  - as "breaking the law," breaking the moral code, making the sinner automatically liable for punishment. ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- The question that then arises in **Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment Theory** is:
  - Does it make sense for "punishment" (intended as "retribution") to be transferred to another person?
  - In particular, is it "just" to "transfer" "punishment" to an innocent person? ■

# Substitutionary Punishment

- Both the **Satisfaction Theory** and the **Substitutionary Punishment Theory** have a powerful emotional appeal, as expressed in these lyrics by Charles Wesley, 1738:
  - And can it be that I should gain
  - An interest in the Savior's blood?
  - Died He for me, who caused His pain?
  - For me, who Him to death pursued?
  - Amazing love! how can it be
  - That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me? ■



# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- **Peter Abelard** (1079-1142) was a maverick theologian and philosopher in Paris.
  - He was castrated by thugs paid by his wife's uncle, and was constantly hounded by a church inquisition.
- He tried to provide an alternative theory of atonement to the **Ransom Theory** and **Anselm's Satisfaction Theory**, a theory that would do greater justice to God's love. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- Abelard argued:
- God *does not*:
  - need payment of a penalty, or
  - need to deal with the devil.
- God *does* need sinful people to repent and throw themselves on his mercy. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- Our problem:
  - our minds are often clouded and confused about God, and
  - our wills are misdirected; our wills often love the wrong things. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- Abelard suggested Jesus' main work of redemption on the cross was to reveal the enormity of God's divine love for humanity and for the sinner:
  - Jesus had laid down his life for humanity out of love. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

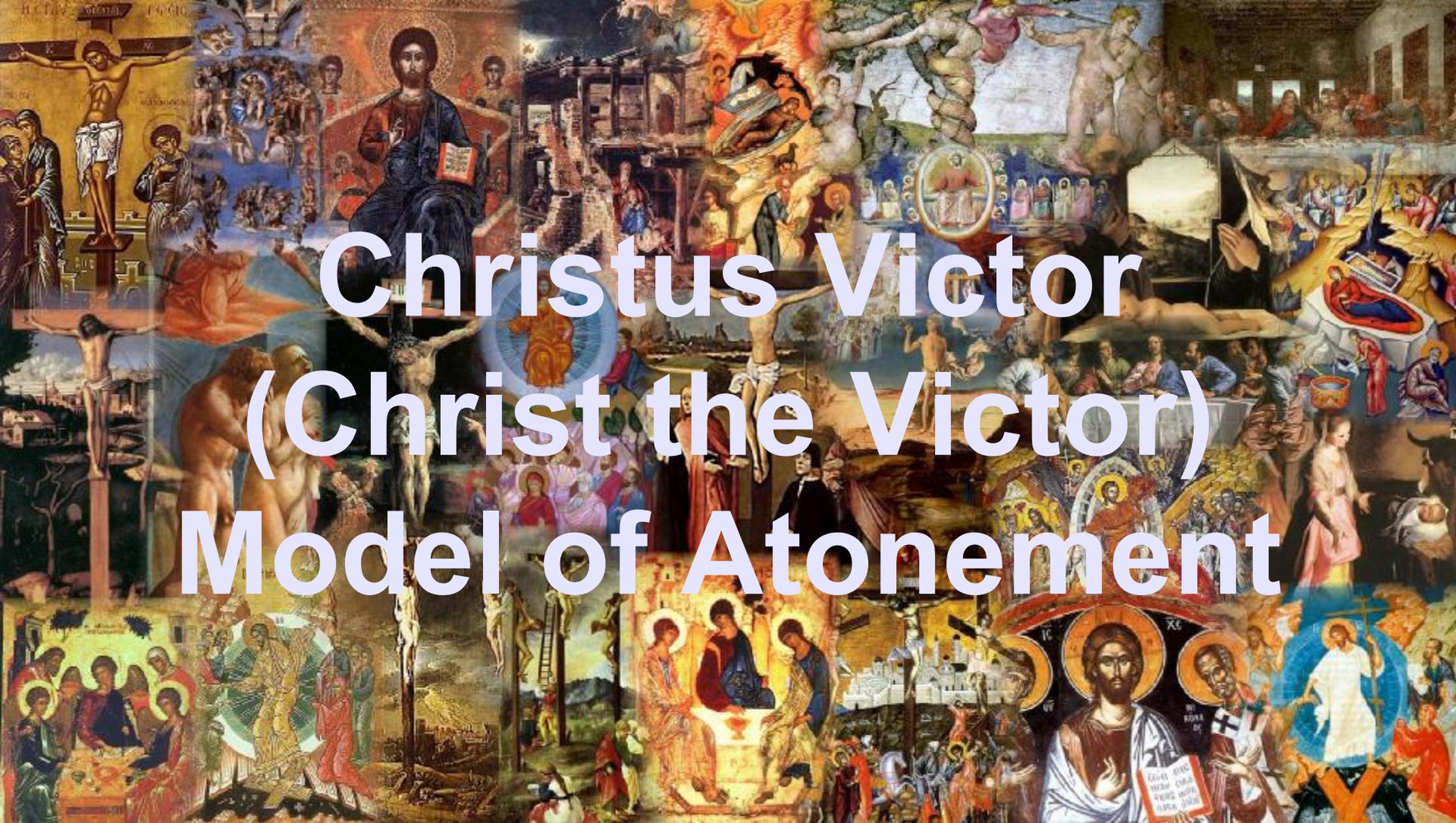
- Furthermore, Jesus' display of God's love for us on the cross is not merely a "passive" example for us to imitate, but rather an *active, transformative power* that:
  - ignites or arouses love within our hearts,
  - clears the confusion in our understanding of God: God is not a harsh judge but is merciful and loving;
  - redirects our will to God, causing us to trust God and repent of our sins. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- Abelard is often accused of reducing the cross of Christ to just a "passive" moral example, but this is wrong.
- Abelard argues the display of God's divine love for us on the cross is *an active, transformative power* that continues through history to possess the power to change us. ■

# Abelard's Theory of Atonement

- The great hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” lyrically expresses Abelard’s atonement model. ■



# Christus Victor (Christ the Victor) Model of Atonement

# Christus Victor

- During the Reformation Luther drew on:
  - New Testament themes of battle,
  - Early Christian concepts of Christ as victor over Satan and death,
- to develop what is now called the **Christus Victor (Christ the victor) model of Atonement**.
- This model is not so much a rational explanation as a dramatic expression of conquest.
- In modern times it was popularized by Lutheran theologian Gustav Aulen in his book *Christus Victor*. ■

# Christus Victor

- Our predicament:
  - Creation was held in bondage to superior (to us) evil powers:
    - sin, death, and the devil, and the law.
  - Sin was like a virulent plague against which we had no defense.
    - We were basically infected with evil and we had no cure for it.
  - We, and the whole of creation, were under the control of these evil powers, and were utterly unable to free ourselves. ■

# Christus Victor

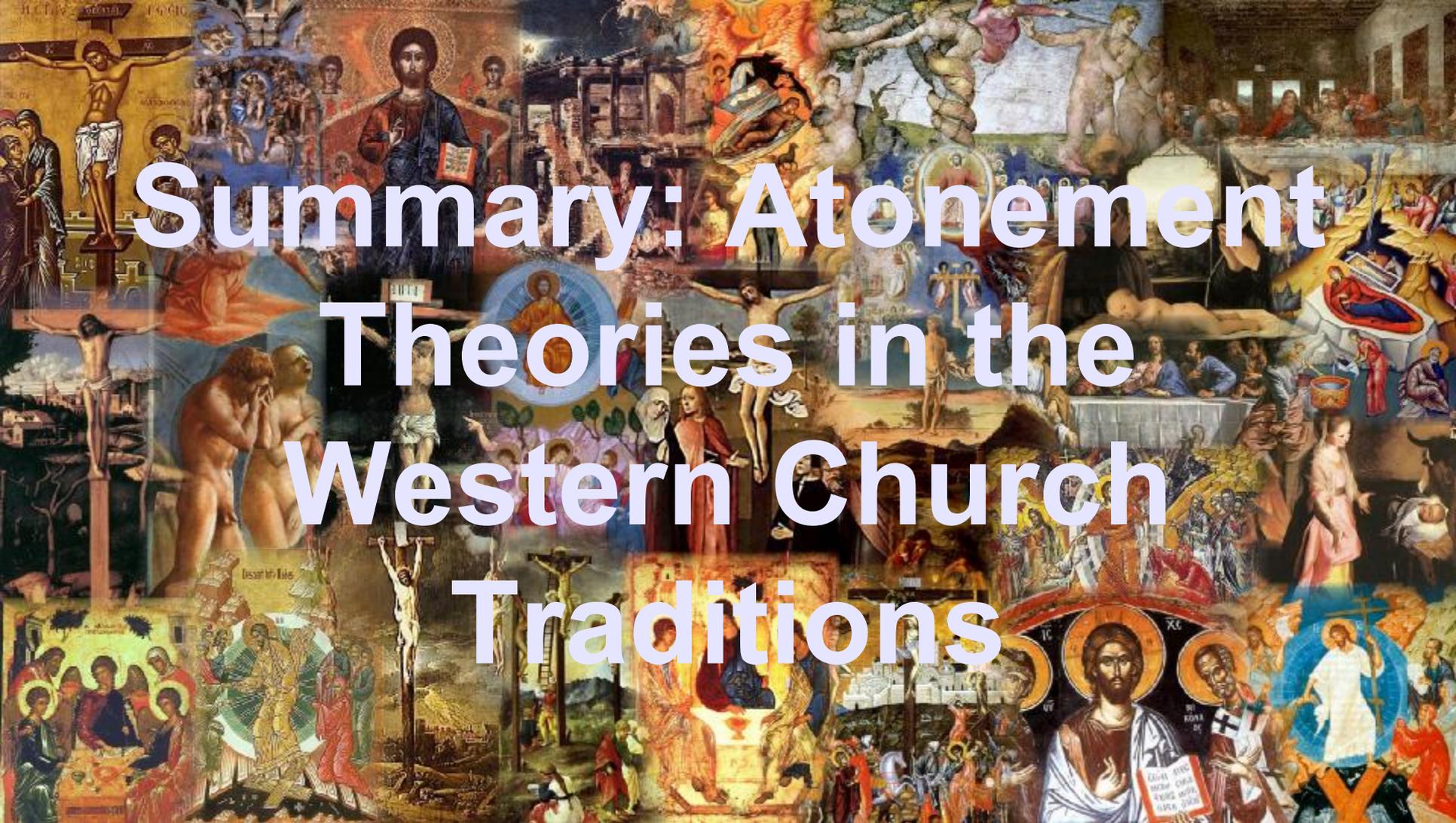
- The devil was:
  - a real, evil personal power that continually sought to gain more and more control over humans, and
  - was the master of sin and death.
- The law was essentially good, but
  - through the perversion of legalism it had become evil. ■

# Christus Victor

- According to Luther and Aulen, the heart of Christ's atoning work for humanity was his victorious invasion and conquest of Satan's territory where humans had been held captive, a spiritual battle in which Christ — Christus Victor — fights and triumphs over:
  - sin,
  - death,
  - the devil, and
  - all the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering. ■

# Christus Victor

- Jesus triumphed by:
  - living a sinless life,
  - resisting all the temptations of the devil,
  - overcoming death through his resurrection. ■



# Summary: Atonement Theories in the Western Church Traditions

# Atonement in the West

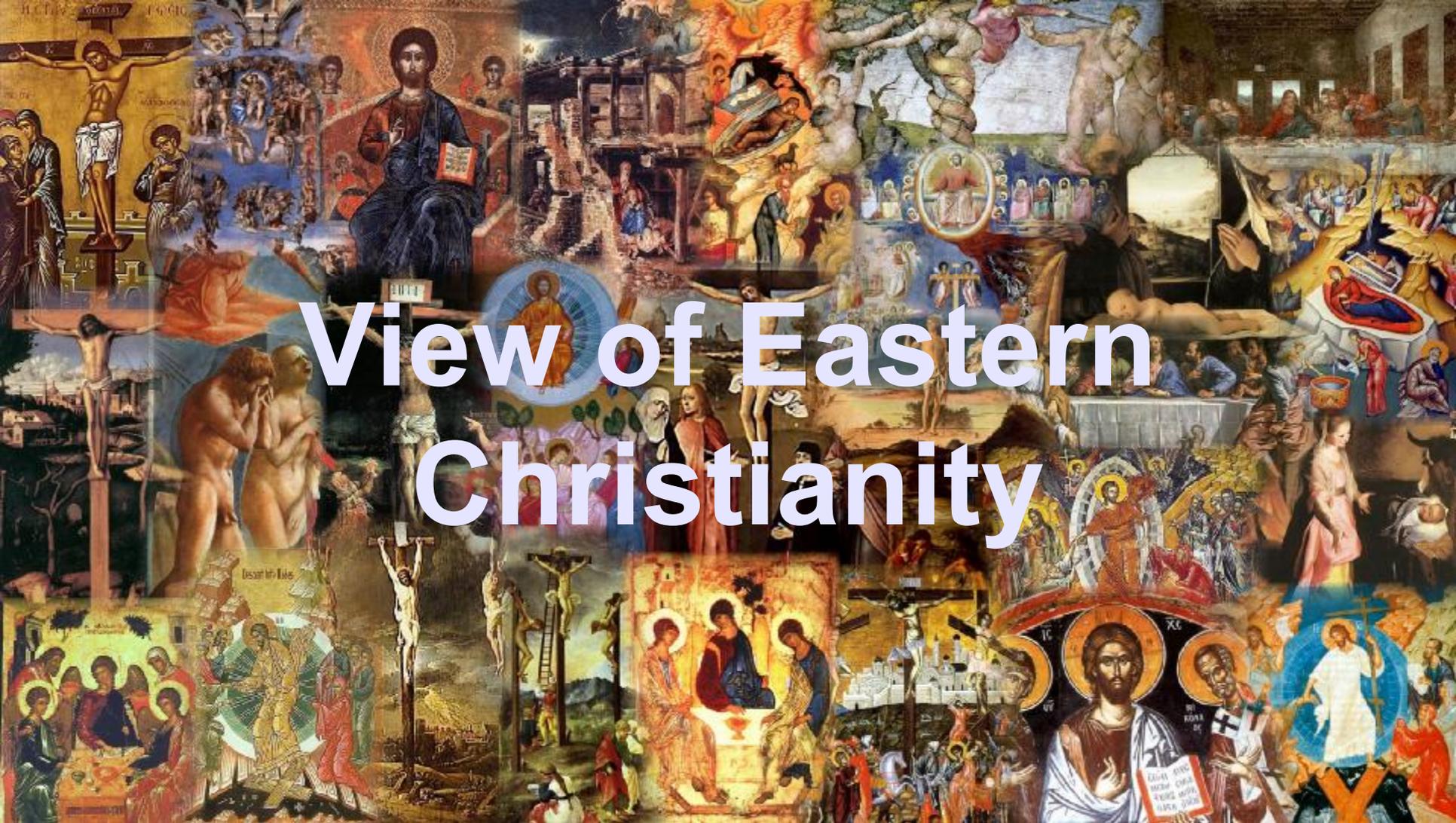
- The theories of atonement we've been discussing are not “doctrines.”
- As Christians, we must only profess: Jesus Christ provides salvation for the world (humanity) by his life, death and resurrection.
- Some of the Western Christians traditions do gravitate to a particular theories without necessarily requiring it. ■

# Atonement in the West

- The Roman Catholic Church has enshrined **Anselm's Substitutionary Theory** as the finished work of Christ, but leaves the door open to additions from other theories.
- The Lutheran churches tend to lean towards Luther's dramatic **Christus Victor Theory**.
- Conservative Reformed churches and Baptist tend to stick closely to **Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment theory**.
- Episcopalians and Methodists maintain a broad outlook that holds up the Christian consensus without requiring any particular model. ■

# Atonement in the West

- Most evangelical Protestants prefer **Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment theory**.
  - Some evangelical Christian colleges, Bible colleges, and seminaries in North America do require their faculty to sign a statement of doctrinal orthodoxy that insists the mechanism of salvation is Calvin's Substitutionary Punishment Theory of atonement. ■



# View of Eastern Christianity

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Unlike the Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity does *not* focus on the cross and does *not* specifically ask "Why did Jesus have to die on the cross?"
- They instead view **the incarnation and the whole of Jesus' life, death and resurrection** as saving, as "at-one"ing. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- One major, key difference between Western and Eastern Christians is how they view the **incarnation**.
- Western Christians affirm that in the incarnation, Jesus, remaining fully divine, became fully *a* human being.
- Eastern Christians go beyond Western Christians, and assert that in becoming a human being, Jesus caused a dramatic *transformation* in the "human nature" of *all* human beings.
- The "human nature" we all share was "divinized," given the capacity to become divine and participate in the divine life.
-

# View of Eastern Christianity

- In the lingo of philosophy, there was an "ontological" (= the nature of being, the nature of existence) change in all of "human nature."
  - Aside: since the human body is composed of organic molecules and ordinary atoms, modern Orthodox theologians suggest the incarnation also changed the very nature of matter in the physical universe, giving it the capacity to become divine, making possible the future "salvation" and perfection of creation. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Jesus' incarnation and birth transformed human nature, giving it the capacity to become divine and participate in divine life.
- His subsequent life as a human being, his death and resurrection then healed the corruption of human nature caused by the fall, restoring it to the full image and likeness of God.
- This healing:
  - occurred through Jesus "**recapitulating**" the life of Adam, and
  - illustrates the belief in Eastern Christianity that the healing of the corrupted human nature required Jesus to "assume" or "take up" every aspect of human life.
    - "**What is not assumed by Jesus cannot be healed.**" ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in France in the second century first proposed the idea of "**recapitulation.**"
- In 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul spoke of Jesus as a "second Adam."
- Irenaeus, taking off on this image of Paul, suggested:
  - In his life on this earth, Jesus repeated or "recapitulated" what Adam had done wrong -- but this time getting it right.
  - Where Adam had been disobedient to God, Jesus was perfectly obedient.
  - Jesus was thus able to "reverse" what Adam had done to our human nature. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- By so "reversing" what Adam had done, Jesus restored the human race to the image and likeness of God that had been lost in Adam.
- Jesus became our "second Adam," the new head of a new human race.
- Jesus, by also becoming the "firstborn of the dead" (Colossians 1:18), made resurrection possible for all members of the new human race, thus freeing us from the bondage of death. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Closely connected with this idea of **"recapitulation"** is the conviction in Eastern Christianity that **the healing of any aspect of human nature required that aspect of human nature to be "assumed" or "taken up" by Jesus.**
  - What is not assumed by Jesus cannot be healed. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- **Gregory of Nazianzus** (329-391) expressed this when he wrote "**The unassumed is unhealed.**"
  - That is: Christ saves us by becoming what we are;
  - he heals us by taking our broken humanity into himself,
  - by "assuming" it as his own,
  - by entering into our human experience
  - by knowing it from the inside, as being himself one of us. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- If Jesus had not fully shared everything about our humanity,
- then our salvation would be incomplete.
- To bring us "total salvation," Jesus had to "assume" *every* aspect of human life. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Jesus had to assume every aspect of our "fallen" human nature to heal it – and he did so, out of love for humanity.
- Jesus lived out his life on earth under the conditions of the fall.
- He was not himself a sinful person, but in his solidarity with fallen man he accepted the full consequences of Adam's sin. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- Jesus accepted not only the physical consequences of our "fallen" human nature, such as:
  - weariness,
  - bodily pain,
  - and eventually the separation of body and soul in death.
- He also accepted the moral consequences; the loneliness, the alienation, the inward conflicts and mixed feelings. ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

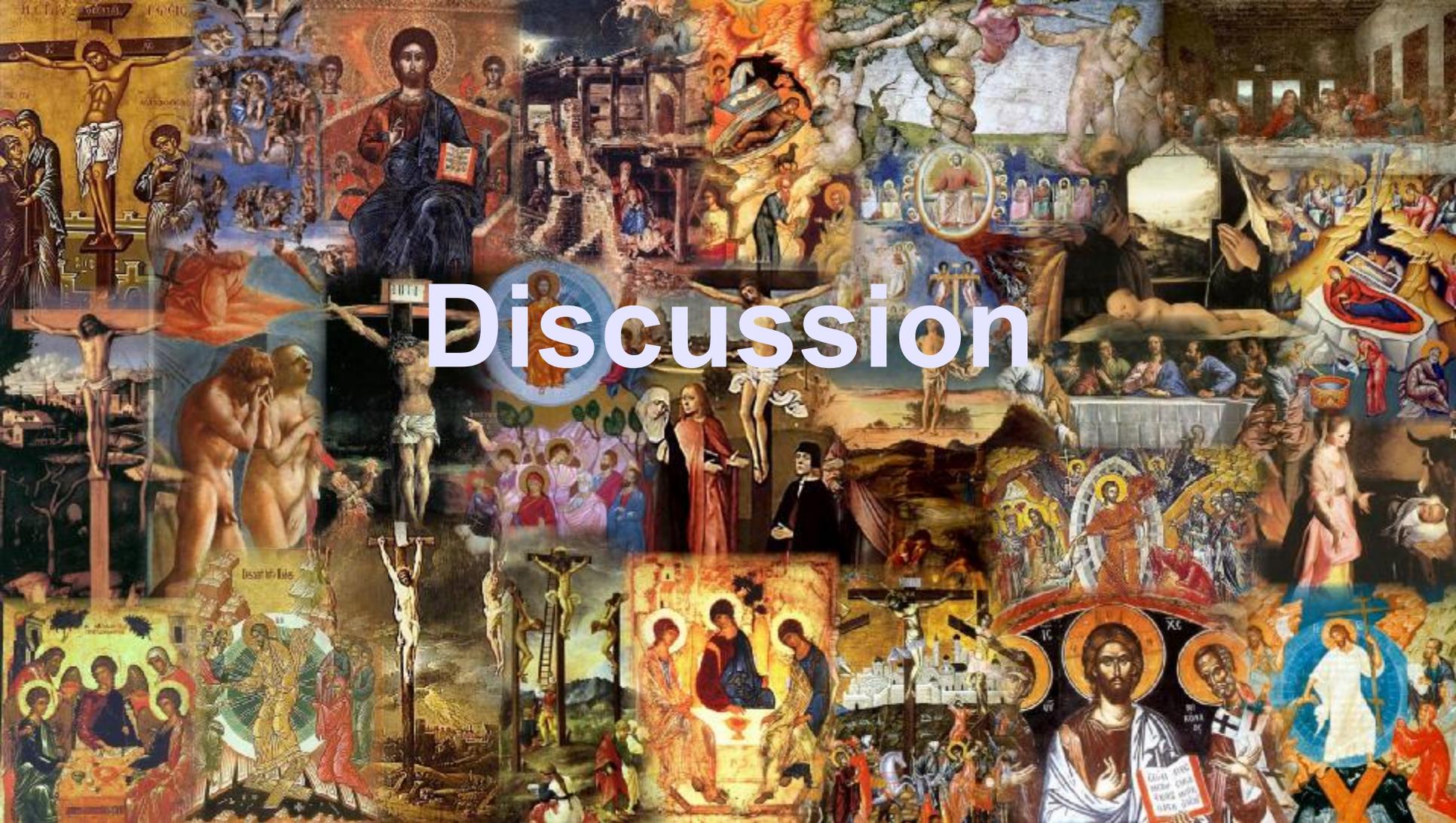
- Eastern Christianity explicitly rejects "substitution" ideas about Jesus' suffering on the cross:
- Jesus did not suffer "instead of us", but rather:
  - Jesus suffers "with us" unto death,
  - doing so on our behalf, assuming every aspect of human life, in order to heal our human nature and thus save us.
- Jesus suffers not to exempt us from suffering, but so that our suffering might become "like his." ■

# View of Eastern Christianity

- In the words of St. Mark the Ascetic:
  - All the penalties imposed by divine judgment upon man for the sin of the first transgression – death, toil, hunger, thirst and the like – He [Jesus] took upon Himself, becoming what we are, so that we might become what He is. The Logos [the second person of the Trinity] became man, so that man might become what He is. The Logos [the second person of the Trinity] became man, so that man might become [like the] Logos. Being rich, He became poor for our sakes, so that through His poverty we might become rich. In His great love for man He became like us, so that through every virtue we might become like Him. ■



**Next Week:  
Eternal Security,  
Blessed Assurance  
(or Not)**



# Discussion