



Redemption

A central question in Christian faith is *why did Jesus die on the cross?* Related to this is the further question how was his death different from anyone else who has been unjustly executed? In answering these questions, the Church throughout its history has developed the theology of redemption.

Redemption comes from the Latin word *redimere* meaning to buy back and is a term often referring to the recovery of ownership by payment or liberating a captive through the payment of a ransom. This etymology gives insight into understanding redemption from a faith perspective. Christ's death redeemed or bought back humanity's freedom from the clutches of sin. This is often referred to as atonement for human sinfulness. St Paul writes: "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith" Romans 3:25

Atonement underpins the often used phrase: "Jesus died to save me from my sins".

While atonement theology is well established in Catholic teaching it does have its limitations.

There is danger in imaging God as a vengeful God demanding the blood of his Son to appease for the sinfulness of humanity. While it certainly has scriptural support, atonement is not the only theology on Jesus' death that features in the New Testament.

John's gospel uses rich imagery to highlight Jesus self-gift of love. In Chapter 15, John describes someone who freely lays down his life for a friend out of love (15:13). At the last supper, John's gospel is the only gospel that has Jesus washing the feet of his disciples as a model of service and self-sacrifice. Through this imagery John frames Jesus' death in the light of loving self-surrender; an act freely chosen, not demanded by a vengeful God. The metaphor of loving self-surrender does not shy away from the costly giving of one's self but does not confuse it with the often misunderstood notion of sacrifice as the onus remains on Jesus' active agency in offering of himself in love.