

THE COMPASSION THEORY OF ATONEMENT

God's Compassion in Atonement

I call the framework of concepts of atonement found in LDS scripture the “com-passion” view of atonement because compassion etymologically means to “feel in union with.” It is two words: “com” from the Latin *cum*, meaning “to be with,” and “passion,” meaning to be moved by or feel with. The purpose of the Atonement is to overcome our alienation by creating compassion, a life shared in union where we are moved by our love for each other. “The Passion” also refers to Christ’s suffering—and thus com-passion is to share in Christ’s suffering and he in ours, that we might share also in the unsurpassable joy of each others’ lives. I also want to be clear that the theory that I propose here will undoubtedly be controversial among many Latter-day Saints because they accept the traditional views that I critique.

The compassion theory can be summarized as follows: The purpose of the atonement in LDS scripture is to “bring about the bowels of mercy” so that God is moved with compassion for us and we are moved with gratitude to trust him by opening our hearts to him. The result of the Atonement is that we are free to choose to turn back to God, and he is free to accept us into a relationship of shared life. Atonement removes, casts out, and releases the guilt that alienates us; and it also brings us together