

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 10. Its Efficacy

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Transcript

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In our last chapter we considered the Divine design in Christ's Satisfaction; in this we propose to show from Scripture that that design must be accomplished. Two widely differing views have been taken concerning the effectuation of what the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus was meant to achieve. Some have affirmed that the Atonement possesses only a conditional efficacy, others that it is vested with an infallible efficacy. These two views are known as the Arminian and the Calvinistic interpretations. They are completely antagonistic and utterly irreconcilable. The difference between them is that of Truth and error, Light and darkness, Jehovah and Baal, God and the Devil. Before attempting to set forth some of the sure grounds on which rests the certain accomplishment of God's purpose in the obedience and suffering of Christ, we will first glance briefly at the contrary view and expose its fallacy. It is high time that some voice was raised in protest against the fearful perversions of Divine truth which are now being given out by many, who, though posing as the champions of orthodoxy, are nothing more than wolves in sheep's clothing, blind, leading those who follow their pernicious heresies into the ditch. The omnipotency of God is now frittered down to a persuasive power which He brings to bear upon sinners, but which is so feeble that it fails to move the great majority who are subject to it: more than this "persuasion" must not be affirmed, lest man be reduced to a "mere machine." The all-efficacious Atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, is degraded to a "remedy" which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed to. The invincible work of the Holy Spirit is supposed to be nothing more than an "offer" of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please. That such frightful errors should now be accepted in "churches" calling themselves "Fundamentalists," only shows how far the Apostasy has advanced. The horrible and blasphemous idea of Arminians is that the wondrous and perfect Atonement of Christ has made sure and certain the salvation of none, that it has only made possible the salvation of all who hear the Gospel. When this "possibility" is carefully examined it is found to be an impossibility! The supposed "possibility" is that fallen man, while dead in trespasses and sins, must fulfill a certain condition, must of himself perform a certain act which God is said to require of him, before the sacrifice of Christ can be of any avail. That "condition" is faith; that "act" is that he must believe. Now to reduce the "great salvation" which Christ procured and secured to a bare possibility, as something which is available for everyone but sure for no one, is to say that Christ did no more for Peter and Paul than He did for Pilate and Judas. Everything is thus left to chance and uncertainty. To make the efficacy of Christ's Atonement depend upon an act of man's will is highly dishonoring to our blessed Savior. To say that the success of

the greatest of all God's works is left contingent upon the creature's pleasure is most insulting to the Almighty, impeaching as it does His wisdom, goodness and justice. To teach that salvation lies within the sinner's own power to secure, is to flatly deny Christ when He said "with men this is impossible" (Matthew 19:26). Alas, nearly all preachers today speak of faith in Christ as a comparatively easy matter, as though it were well within the range of the sinner's own ability. But the Scriptures teach far otherwise. They teach that man by nature is spiritually bound with fetters, such as none hut God can break (Gal. 5:1), that he is shut up in darkness (Eph. 4:18), and is in a prison house (Isa. 61:1). The salvation of no man is "possible" apart from the effectual operations of God's invincible grace. To affirm the "possibility" of an unregenerate sinner believing in Christ to the saving of his soul, is to deny that "men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19), that "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8), that the "carnal mind is enmity against God." In short, it is to repudiate the fact that man is, by nature, a fallen creature, dead in trespasses and sins. Carnality cannot thirst after holiness. An evil tree cannot produce good fruit. A corpse cannot quicken itself. Man's will, like all his other faculties, has been disabled by the fall. His only hope is the intervention of sovereign and omnipotent grace: that God will perform upon and within him a miracle of mercy: that Divine power will lift him out of the grave of sin and make him a new creature in Christ Jesus. Until he is born again he can no more love God, savingly believe in Christ, or walk in the Spirit, than he can create a world. We have not said that faith is unnecessary, nor that God does not call on man to believe the Gospel. What we do say is that faith is God's gift, that this gift was purchased by Christ for all for whom He died, and that in due time this gift is imparted to them. As this will come before us again we shall say no more upon it now; instead, we proceed to call attention to some of the many infallible proofs which demonstrate the certain efficacy of Christ's Satisfaction.

1. THE PURPOSE OF GOD All the designs of a Being possessed of infinite wisdom and almighty power must be fulfilled. It is impossible that they should be frustrated. In Ephesians 3:11 we read of "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." The context shows what that "eternal purpose" concerned. It was a "dispensation of the grace of God" (v. 2) toward poor sinners. It was that elect Jews and elect Gentiles should be "fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel" (v. 6). It was that these should be partakers of "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8). It was that by means of the Church the "manifold wisdom of God" should be exhibited (v. 10). This same "eternal purpose" of God is revealed in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." Now the purpose of God is absolutely certain of fulfillment. He Himself emphatically declares, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). e insists that, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord" (Prov. 21:30). Neither the malice of man nor the enmity of Satan can prevent the infallible accomplishment of whatsoever God hath ordained. To affirm the contrary is blasphemy. In Proverbs 19:21 we are told that "there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." There were many "devices" in the heart of Pharaoh against Jehovah and His people, nevertheless the "counsel" of the Lord stood fast. There were many "devices" in the heart of Saul of Tarsus against Christ and His church, and though he kicked against the pricks, nevertheless, the "counsel" of the Lord was accomplished. "The counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). This is the firm and glorious confidence of His saints. No ingenuity of man and no plotting of the Devil can overthrow it, no, nor so much as hinder it. "Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). Hath He "from the beginning chosen us unto salvation"? (2 Thessalonians 2:13) Then saved we must be. Hath He redestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will"? (Eph. 1:5) Then that will must be fulfilled. God's purpose is immutable (Heb. 6:17), invincible (Ps. 2:6), triumphant (Isa. 14:26, 27). Before there can be the slightest failure in the accomplishment of the Divine design in the

Atonement of Christ, God must cease to be! But this is impossible. 2. THE COVENANT OF GOD Now it is obviously impossible to have any clear views of what the Lord Jesus died to achieve, if we have no real knowledge of the Eternal Agreement between the Father and the Son in fulfillment of which His death took place. Yet, today, deplorable to say, even the great majority of those considered evangelical — to mention no others — have scarcely any such knowledge. The very fact that that Covenant was proposed, accepted and drawn up before the foundation of the world, proves beyond all shadow of doubt that it was unconditional so far as man is concerned, for he then had no existence! Therefore he cannot be a party to it, even though his eternal well-being is the object of it. It must be admitted that, in effecting salvation, God acts agreeably to a preconceived plan or designed arrangement. We say "must;" — for to deny this is to impute to the infinitely wise God conduct such as is found only among the most thoughtless and foolish among men, conduct such as is exemplified in no other department of His works, for in all of them we discover such order and regularity as clearly evince the existence of an original plan or design. Hence, to direct attention to the Everlasting Covenant is but to show that God is now working according to an eternal purpose. The Scriptures plainly represent the Divine persons as entering into a federal agreement for the salvation of men. In that covenant the Father is the representative of the Godhead, and the Son the representative of those who are to be redeemed. He is, on that account, called the "Surety" (Heb. 7:22) and "Mediator" (Heb. 8:6) of the covenant. Whatever He did as Surety or Mediator must, therefore, have been done in connection with the covenant. The great Architect of the universe drew up His plans before ever a creature was brought into existence. Everything concerning Christ and His Church was firmly settled beyond possibility of alteration. All that concerns the being and well-being of His people is done according to God's covenant-enactment. As Ephesians 1:11 declares, God "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." Yes, "He will ever be mindful of His covenant" (Ps. 111:5). There were no contingencies, no uncertainties, no peradventures. All the affairs of the elect were settled by the mutual consent of all the persons of Deity. The Father made choice of the elect (Eph. 1:4), the Son accepted that choice (John 17:10), the Spirit recorded it in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 13:8). The Father decreed salvation, the Son consented to purchase it, the Spirit pledged Himself to the communication of it. Now as stated in an earlier chapter, a covenant is an agreement between two parties who are under mutual engagements. Something is to be done by one of the parties, in consequence of which the other party binds himself to do something in return. When a master, for example, enters into an agreement or covenant with a servant, he prescribes certain duties to be performed by the servant and promises to recompense him with suitable wages. By consenting to the compact, the servant becomes bound to perform the stipulated work, and the master is bound to bestow the reward when the term of labor is finished. Such an agreement, such a compact, was entered into between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world. Clear proof of this is found in Isaiah 49:1-19; 2 Timothy 1:9. In Isaiah 53:10-12 we have recorded the promises which God made to the Mediator. In John 17:24 we hear Christ putting in His claim to the fulfillment of that promise. The covenant is "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5). It is "sure" in its ordinations, operations, communications, preservations, and consummations. Yes, it is a salvation worthy of God! Well might the late Joseph Irons say, "O the vast importance of getting at and possessing an infallible Christianity! The Devil knew well of what worth and importance that word was, and, therefore, he carried it off to Rome, that the vilest of wretches might claim it as theirs and talk about infallible heads, and infallible decrees, and infallible councils and infallible vicars of Christ. I wonder the earth does not swallow them up as it did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; It is such blasphemous presumption. They talk about infallibility, and then run away to Gaeta to take care of it; they talk about infallibility, and then are obliged to have an army of infidels from France to reestablish and to preserve it. I would not give a straw for such infallibility. I want the infallibility of the throne of God, the infallibility of the existence of

Deity, the infallibility that is sworn to by the Persons of Godhead, that is ratified in the oaths of His Word, embraced and enjoyed in my own soul; all the members of Christ secure in His hands, so that none shall pluck them thence; all the purposes of grace infallibly settled; and all that the Father gave Him be infallibly brought home, to behold His glory and see Him as He is." The Satisfaction of Christ was the one and only "condition" of the Covenant. It was stipulated as the condition of His having a seed to serve Him, that He should make His soul an offering for sin, that He should bear their iniquities, that He should pour out His soul unto death. In reference to this, we find Him saying to His apostles on the eve of His crucifixion, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The blood of Christ was not shed by accident, nor was it poured out at random or on a venture. No, He laid down His life by commandment: He had received orders from His Father so to do: John 10:18. The blood of Christ was the sealing of the Covenant, and by it He has actually purchased to Himself the Church of God: Acts 20:28. At the close of His earthly career we find Christ saying to the Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). On the ground of this He prays, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self" (v. 5). Furthermore He said, "Father I will that they may behold my glory" (v. 24). Having faithfully discharged His part of the Contract, the Father is now in honor bound to bring to Heaven every one for whom Christ died. So far as the elect are concerned, the design of the Mediator's work was not that God might, if He would, but that He should, by virtue of His engagement with the Surety, actually bestow on the Church all that He merited for it. Therefore we boldly affirm that, before there can be the slightest failure in the Divine design of the Atonement, the Father must betray the Son's confidence in Him and prove false to His own stipulation with Him. That is impossible.

3. THE VERACITY OF GOD In the past eternity the Father made definite promises to the Mediator. From these we may cite the following: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison" (Isa. 42:6,7). "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel [namely "the Israel of God", Gal. 6:16] be justified, and shall glory" (Isa. 45:25). "Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful" (Isa. 49:7). "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (Isa. 53:11, 12). "Ask of me, and I shall give the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession (Ps. 2:8). In view of these promises, Christ had a joy "set before him," for which joy he endured the Cross and despised the shame (Heb. 12:2). Now if one man enters into a solemn engagement with another which is duly ratified, signed, sealed and witnessed to, for him to attempt to break it would be to violate his honor, forfeit his good name, and make him an object of contempt to all righteous people. But the man who is honorable and upright, respects his pledges: his word is his bond. Infinitely more so does all this hold good of Him who is the God of Truth. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the Son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). God not only entered into formal covenant with Christ, not only made Him definite promises, but solemnly placed Himself on oath to the certain fulfillment of them: "My covenant will I not break; nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto the beloved" (Ps. 89:34, 35). Here then is another sure and unchanging ground of confidence. The very perfections of Deity stand pledged unto the triumphant issue of Christ's Satisfaction. The honor of God is involved in it. His faithfulness is at stake. His veracity is eternally pledged for the fulfillment of every iota of the grand Charter between Himself and the Mediator of His people.

Therefore not a promise can fail, not one elect vessel of mercy be cast out. There can be no failure, for nothing is left contingent on the creature. As Psalm 111:5 declares "He will ever be mindful of His covenant." Here is security indeed. God will not change His mind, revoke His choice, or violate His pledge. Therefore we boldly affirm that, before there can be the slightest failure in the Divine design concerning the Atonement, the Father would have to falsify His promises, lie to His Son, and go back upon His most solemn oath. Such is utterly impossible.

4. THE POWER OF GOD The work of Christ, of itself, never did, never will, and never can, save a single soul. God must carry that death into effect. If the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice should be left for men to receive or reject, men to help forward or impede the prosperity thereof, then His death would be utterly in vain. But the Lord Jesus did not leave the virtues of His Atonement to depend upon the creature. No, He committed His cause and interests unto the Father. Hear Him saying. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we" (John 17:11). Unto the keeping power of the Father did Christ entrust those for whom He died. We have shown in previous chapters that Christ died not as a private person, but as the federal head of the whole election of grace; therefore His final act on the Cross must be understood as signifying "Father, into thy hands I commend my [mystical] spirit" (Luke 23:46). And what was the Father's response? Psalm 110 tells us. The Father not only exalted Christ to His own right hand, but solemnly assured Him that, "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion... thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power" (v. 2, 3). Thereby He promised to make the preaching of the Gospel successful unto the saving of His "people." Invincible grace should open hearts to the reception of its message (Acts 16:14), and they should be "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). Therefore we boldly say that, before there can be the slightest failure in the Divine design concerning the Atonement, God must be stripped of His omnipotence. But that is impossible.

5. THE JUSTICE OF GOD "There are many who plead for the atonement of Christ, who, in effect, deny it, as well as its open opposers. They suppose that it is a conditional atonement, of efficacy only to those who comply with certain terms. It is evident, however, that a conditional atonement is no atonement in the proper sense of the word; for an atonement must expiate the sins atoned for, just as a payment cancels a debt. Where, then, there has been an actual atonement made, the sins atoned for never can be punished again, any more than a debt once paid can be charged a second time. It would be unjust in God to charge the debt to the account of man that was fully paid by man's Surety. It may be alleged that one man may pay another man's debt upon certain conditions; and that if those conditions are not fulfilled, the debt will be still chargeable upon the debtor. But it is evident that, in such a case, the surety either does not actually pay the debt till the conditions are fulfilled, or if he has conditionally paid it, he is refunded before it is chargeable upon the debtor. In every such case, the debt is not really paid. But Jesus has paid the debt. He has already made atonement; and if they for whom He died are not absolved, the debt is charged a second time. Christ can never be refunded. His blood has been shed; and there is no possibility that what He suffered can be now either more or less. They, then, who suspend the efficacy of the atonement of Christ upon conditions to be complied with by man, in effect deny that atonement has been truly made" (Alex. Carson, 1847). Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Assuredly. His very perfections move Him to give every one His due. This principle is exemplified time after time in Holy Writ. Then shall God make an exception of His Son? No, indeed. God ever acts sovereignly, but He never acts unrighteously. Just as He will not, cannot (Exodus 34:7), remit sin without satisfaction, so He will not, cannot (Job 4:7), punish sin where satisfaction has been received. To condemn one for whom an atonement has been accepted, would be as incompatible with perfect equity as to ignore sin without an atonement. If the punishment of sin has been borne, the remission of the offense follows, of course. God never punishes twice for the same crime. Thus, inasmuch as the oblation of Christ

was a legal satisfaction for sin, all for whom it was offered must enjoy the remission of their transgressions. It is a matter of bare justice that those blessings which Christ intended to procure for His people should be actually bestowed upon them. First, because this was promised Him as the reward of His obedience and sufferings; that reward has been fully earned. Second, because He actually purchased salvation for them. The enmity of the carnal mind may object that such a conception is a "commercializing" of Divine love, but Scripture does not hesitate to employ pecuniary terms: "Ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20). What has been paid for, the purchaser has a right to. To deny that to him would be unjust. Again, the Word speaks of our sins as "debts" (Matthew 6:12): if then Christ has discharged them, He has the right to demand the exemption of all for whom He acted as Sponsor. Therefore we boldly affirm that, before there can be the slightest failure in the Divine design of the Atonement, God must cease to hate iniquity, and love righteousness. But that is impossible.

6. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD The law of substitution, which is a principle appointed by the Divine government, requires the salvation of all those whom Christ represented. "Perfect suretyship, whether we regard the supreme instance and exemplification of it in the work of Christ in our behalf, or the most common and familiar instances of it as exemplified among men, is always and manifestly suretyship which, in its own nature, secures and necessitates, the reinstatement of every one in whose behalf it is undertaken" (John Armour). Now as Christ fully met every demand of the Law, both preceptive and penal, against His people, its claims having been satisfied, cannot be again enforced. In the fifth chapter of this series we sought to define with care the meaning of the term "substitution." We pointed out that substitutionary suffering is that which is endured in the stead of others, in their actual place. Such suffering inevitably carries with it the exemption of the party or parties in whose room it is endured. What is done or suffered by a substitute, completely absolves those whom he represents from doing or suffering the same thing. Christ so satisfied the law of God in behalf of His people that the law can now make no claim whatsoever upon them. The death of Christ was as truly and actually a substitutionary one as was the death of those animals sacrificed in Old Testament times in lieu of the death of the transgressor offering them. Thus the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ requires Divine justice to remit the sins and to reinstate in Divine favor all for whose sake it was made. Substitution necessarily involves two parties: an offender and one who takes his place, a debtor and one who discharges it for him. It is equally self-evident that substitution involves a two-fold effect; the position of each is changed in relation to the law. The one who before was innocent now becomes guilty, and the one who before was guilty now becomes innocent. This is a palpable fact and not a fine-spun theory. If then Christ bore the sins of His people, no sin can rest on them. If on their behalf He was made a curse, the law cannot now curse them. With the apostle we triumphantly exclaim, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? — God that justifieth! Who is he that condemneth? — Christ that died" (Rom. 8:33, 34). Therefore we boldly affirm that, before there can be the least failure in the Divine design of Christ's Atonement, the Throne of God, which is founded upon "righteousness and judgment" (Ps. 97:2), must be overturned. But that is impossible.

7. THE GLORY OF GOD No lengthy argument is needed to establish the fact that the glory of God requires the mediatorial work of Christ should be completely efficacious, i.e., that it should infallibly accomplish all it was designed to effect. If there were any failure in the fruits or results of the Atonement, then the purpose of God would be foiled, His covenant broken, His veracity forfeited, His power defeated, His justice sullied, and His glory dishonored. Few seem to realize the fearful implications which necessarily follow the principles they hold and advocate. To predicate an Atonement which fails to atone, a Redemption which does not redeem, a Sacrifice which secures not the actual remission of sins, is a horrible reflection upon all the attributes of God. To make the efficacy or success of the greatest of all God's works dependent upon the choice of fallen and depraved creatures, is to magnify man at the cost of dethroning his Maker. The manifestative glory of God is bound up in the

person and work of Christ. Our Lord Jesus revealed this plainly when, facing the crucial hour, He cried, "Father glorify thy name" (John 12:28). Again He declared, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (John 13:31). Compare also John 14:13. If Christ be dishonored, God is dishonored. But if Christ be glorified by the Father's acceptance of His work and by the Spirit's infallible application thereof, so that every effect is produced which it was intended to bring forth, then is God supremely glorified. Therefore we boldly declare that, before there can be the slightest failure in the Divine design of the Atonement, God must cease to have any respect for His own honor. But that can never be.

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