

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 2. Its Source

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Transcript

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"In approaching this solemn and sacred mystery we should do so with awe and reverence, remembering it is rather a subject of faith and adoration than of reasoning and arguing; a sanctuary open indeed to the meek and sorrowful, to the earnest and contrite, but always to be approached with solemnity and godly fear" (A. Saphir). It is written, "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9). The "meek" are they who have no confidence in the flesh, who lean not unto their own understanding, whose dependence is in and upon God alone. The source of the Atonement or Satisfaction of Christ is God. This of necessity, for only God can produce that which satisfies Himself. Men can no more provide that which will meet the requirements of God's holiness and justice against their sins than they can create a universe: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give a ransom for him" (Ps. 49:7). A perfect law can only be kept by a perfect creature. One who has been rendered impotent by sin is "without strength" (Rom. 5:6) to do anything that is good; therefore deliverance must come from without himself: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:3,4). "In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). Such words at the commencement of Holy Writ are worthy of their Divine Author. God is both the Alpha and Omega. He is the Beginning and the End of everything, for "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). Nothing can exist apart from God. In creation, in providence, and in redemption, God is the Beginning. But for God, not a creature would have had being. But for God, not a creature could continue for a moment, for "in Him we live, and move, and have our being." But for God's direct permission, sin could not have entered the world; and but for His will in determining, His grace in providing, His power in securing, His Spirit in applying, there had been no satisfaction made for the failed responsibilities of His people. Yes, God and God alone is the Source of the great and glorious Atonement. His will was the determining factor, His love the motive-spring, His righteousness the incentive, His manifested glory the end. In humbly attempting to amplify the several members of the preceding sentence, we earnestly cry with one of old, "That which I see not teach thou me" (Job 34:32). May it please the God of all grace to prepare the hearts of both writer and reader to contemplate the supernal glories of the Divine character. 1. THE WILL OF GOD Of necessity this must be the starting-point when considering the ultimate source of anything, for God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). It is nowhere said that He worketh all things according to "the requirements of His holiness," though God does

not and cannot do that which is unholy. There is no conflict between the Divine will and the Divine nature, yet it needs to be insisted upon that God is a law unto Himself. God does what He does, not simply because righteousness requires Him so to act, but what God does is righteous simply because He does it. All the Divine works issue from mere sovereignty. "Creation could be nothing else but a sovereign act. To deny sovereignty here, would be to deny sovereignty altogether: for, if the created universe came into being, and is what it is, as a necessary consequence of a 'First Cause,' that first cause could not be a person, could not be endowed with freedom of will, could not be God. Besides, if the existence of this first cause necessitated the existence of the universe, it must have done so from all eternity. There could have been no beginning of the created universe. "Redemption, as well as creation, must also be a purely sovereign determination of the Divine will. This is required by the necessities of the case, as well as plainly declared in Scripture. No doctrine of Redemption that in any way casts the slightest shadow over the high mountain of Divine Sovereignty can be tolerated for a moment. All theologies that in any manner teach or imply that there was any obligation upon God to do this or that for fallen, rebellious subjects of law, are unscriptural, unreasonable, if not blasphemous. Divine sovereignty is to be recognized as determined to save any fallen ones, in determining who should be saved, in 'choosing,' raising up,' and 'delivering up' the Savior, and in the Savior's giving of Himself; but this Sovereign Redemption once determined, was wrought out under law, and in exact accordance with law" (Dr. J. Armour, "Atonement and Law," 1917). What follows may be deemed to savor of metaphysics, yet do we feel it to be called for in view of modern slanderers of God. Even some who are regarded as quite orthodox have drawn a broad distinction, almost a gulf, between the nature of God and the will of God, failing to perceive that God's will is an essential part of His nature. Some have descended so low as to affirm there is in the very nature of things a standard of right which exists independently and apart from God, according to which He Himself acts, must act. Such a conception is not only degrading, but blasphemous. Others who have not adopted this insulting figment, have, nevertheless, been injuriously infected by it, and suppose that God's nature, as quite distinct from His will, is what determines His actions. There is nothing determined by the nature of God which is not determined by the will of God. "When we affirm that God is holy, we do not mean that He makes right right, by simply willing it, but that He wills it because it is right. There must be, therefore, some absolute standard of righteousness" —is how a so-called Bible teacher has recently expressed himself. Even if it be said that the "absolute standard of righteousness" is the Divine nature, if by this be meant God's nature as separate from His determining will, the expression is, to say the least, faulty and misleading. The will of God is an essential part of His nature, and therefore His will is "the absolute standard of right." The will of God is not something related, dependent and determined; but is sovereign, imperial, regnant. God Himself is the ultimate and absolute standard of righteousness. Man is commanded to recognize a standard of righteousness outside of and above himself, and his will and conduct must conform thereto. That standard of righteousness is the revealed will of God. But shall we reason from this that God also recognizes a standard of righteousness to which His will must be conformed, a standard which makes right right, and right being made right, He wills it because it is right? No, indeed. The truth is, that we best discover what the nature of God requires Him to do, by noting what He, by His will, actually does. When God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom. 9:15), He assuredly sets before us His will, in its utmost freedom and sovereignty. But this supreme act of sovereign grace is the act of God Himself, an act into which the whole nature of God (His will being included in that nature) moved Him. We fail to trace anything to its original source unless we track it right back to the sovereign will of God. This is true alike of creation, of providence, and of redemption. God was not obliged to have created this world; He did so simply because it so pleased Him (Rev. 4:10). Having created it, when Adam fell, He could have well left the whole race to perish in its sins, and would have done so, unless His sovereign will had, previously,

determined otherwise. Justice did not require Him to intervene in mercy, for as the righteous Governor of the world, He might have proceeded to uphold the authority of His law by exacting its penalty upon all the disobedient, and thus have given to the unfallen angels a further example of His awful vengeance. Nor did His goodness require that He should rescue any of His rebellious subjects from the misery, which they had brought upon themselves, for He had already given a complete display of that in creation. Nor did His love, abstractly considered, demand that a Savior should be provided; had that been the case one must also have been given to the angels which fell. It needs to be pointed out that the manifestative glory of God does not depend upon the display of any particular attribute, but rather upon the exhibition of them all, in full harmony, and on proper occasions. He is glorified when He bestows blessings upon the righteous, and is equally glorified when He inflicts Punishment on the wicked. God's manifestative glory consists in the revelation of His character to His creatures; yet this is purely optional on His part: it is quite voluntary, and contributes nothing to His happiness, and might have been withheld had He so pleased. Yet, as God always acts consistently with Himself, if He shows Himself at all to His creatures, the discovery will ever correspond to the greatness and excellency of His nature. That the atoning death of Christ had its source in the will of God, is plainly declared in Acts 2:23, "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." Though accomplished in the fullness of time, it was resolved upon before time, decreed and enacted in heaven by the Eternal Three. Therefore do we read in Revelation 13:8 of "The Lamb slain from the foundation [or "founding"] of the earth." Christ was "the Lamb slain" determinately, in the counsel and decree of God (Acts 2:23); promissorily, in the word of God passed to Adam after the fall (Gen. 3:15); typically, in the sacrifices appointed immediately after the promise of redemption (Gen. 3:21; 4:4); efficaciously, in regard of the merit of it, applied by God to believers before the actual sufferings of Christ (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 9:15). "He [God] made him [Christ, the Mediator] to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21): "made" or "constituted" by a Divine statute (i.e., He was ordained to enter the place of the penal condition of sinners). Had not God appointed it, the death of Christ had had no meritorious value. Once more in Hebrews 10 the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice unto the elect is traced back and directly ascribed to the eternal and sovereign will of God. In verse 7, we find Christ Himself saying, as He was about to become incarnate and enter this world, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God"; while in verse 10 we are told, "by the which will we are sanctified [consecrated to God] through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." That which saves, or sanctifies, us is not simply the offering of Christ—for that had availed us nought if it had not been Divinely appointed—but the "will" and decree of the Eternal Three concerning that offering.

2. THE LOVE OF GOD Love was, or better is, the motive-spring of all God's goodness and grace toward His people. He has for them an "everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3). It was "in love" that He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (Eph. 1:5). Proof of this is, that, from all eternity He, "accepted us in [not "in Christ," but] the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)—note carefully that this declaration is given before reference is made to the forgiveness of our sins in verse 7. Had it so pleased God, He could have prevented the entrance of sin into this world, He could have restricted the progeny of Adam to the persons of His elect, and He could have taken them to heaven without their having been polluted by sin and redeemed from it, there to enjoy eternal bliss forever. That would have been an astonishing demonstration of His love for us. Yet it pleased God to grant unto His people still further, fuller, deeper, higher, manifestations of His love to and for them. God loved His people in ordaining them to eternal life (Acts 13:48; Rom. 9:11-13), but He gave yet grander proof by suffering them to fall into a state of spiritual death, and then sending His own dear Son to redeem them out of it. Three hundred years ago Dr. Thomas Goodwin, in his incomparable exposition of Ephesians 1, pointed out that, "Had we at first been brought to that communion with Christ which we shall have in heaven after the day of judgment, without having known either sin or misery, it had been a good and blessed condition indeed; we should have infinitely

rejoiced in it, and had reason to so have done. But certainly heaven will be sweeter to us by reason of our having once fallen into sin and misery, and then having a Redeemer that came and freed us from all, and then brought us to heaven. Oh, how sweet will this make heaven to be unto you!... "I would have you observe this that it may mightily and wonderfully instance the love of God toward us. The last words of Ephesians 1:6 are that God hath accepted us in His Beloved, while the first of verse 7 are 'In whom we have redemption through his blood.' What! Was He God's Beloved, and have you redemption in Him too? Shall God sacrifice His Beloved! God chose us to be holy in heaven with Himself (v. 4), to be sons with Him there (v. 5), to delight in us there (v. 6)! Let that purpose stand: let them never come to be sinful, let Me have them up in heaven presently with My Son. One would have thought God might have said this. No, God would commend His love yet further. He would let them fall into sin; to redeem them. He would sacrifice this Beloved. He had so much love in His heart that He could commend it to us no way but by sacrificing His Beloved. How wondrously has He displayed His love!" That love was the motive-spring which caused God to provide for His people an atoning sacrifice for their sins, is clear from the well-known words of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." So too in 1 John 4:9, 10, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Thus the sacred oracles celebrate the work of redemption as the highest and most remarkable instance and exhibition of Divine love, and direct us to behold it acted out in the highest degree and to the utmost advantage, to be seen and admired by all the elect as an exhaustless and endless source of gratitude and praise. The more unworthy and ill-deserving the objects of that love were in themselves — sinners, enemies (Rom. 5:7-10) — the more amazing that love. The greater the deliverance effected by it, and the costlier the sacrifice to procure that deliverance, the more is such love crowned. The greater the difficulties to be overcome — sin, death, the-grave — the more was that love magnified. The greater the blessings bestowed — justification, sanctification, glorification — the more is that love to be adored. "Herein was the emphasis of Divine love to us, that 'He sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4:10). It was love that He would restore men after the Fall; there was no more necessity of doing this than of creating the world. As it added nothing to the happiness of God, so the want of it had detracted nothing from it. There was no more absolute necessity of setting up man again after his breaking with God, than a new repair of the world after the destructive deluge. But that He might wind up His love to the highest pitch, He would not only restore man, but rather than let him lie in his deserved misery, would punish His own bowels to secure man from it. It was purely His grace [which is love bestowing favors on the hell-deserving — A.W.P.] which was the cause that His Son 'tasted death for every' son, Hebrews 2:9" (S. Charnock, 1635).

3. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD The Atonement of Christ directs our thoughts toward God as One whose governmental holiness demanded satisfaction, whose inflexible justice insisted that its claim be fully met, and whose righteous law must be magnified and made honorable, before any resultant blessings could flow to His elect, considered as the guilty and depraved children of Adam. God can "by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34:7). Unlike so much that passes for it in the human realm, the love of God is not lawless; it is not exercised in defiance of righteousness. God is "light" (1 John 1:5), as well as love; and because He is such, sin cannot be ignored, its heinousness minimized, nor its guilt cancelled. True it is that, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Yet grace did not abound at the expense of righteousness, rather does "grace reign through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21). But could not God remit the sins of His people without an atoning satisfaction? This question is explicitly and authoritatively answered for us in Hebrews 9:22, "Without shedding of blood is no remission." Commenting on this in his remarkable book "The Atonement" (1871), the late Hugh Martin said, "No doubt, at first sight, this seems merely to allege a fact, without assigning a

reason. It seems to intimate nothing more than the historical truth, that in point of fact God never has remitted the sins of men without shedding of blood. But if emphasis is placed on the word remission, and if a true idea is entertained of the transaction which that word represents, the proposition, 'without shedding of blood is no remission,' will be found not merely to allege the fact, but also assign a reason for that fact — to embody not only the historical verity, but the underlying principle which justifies it, and which only needs to be carefully investigated and apprehended to furnish a satisfactory answer to the question, Why should not God remit the sins of men without an Atonement? "For, when the inspired writer affirms that without shedding of blood is no remission, it is as if he had said: You may imagine a forgiveness without shedding of blood, if you will; you may conjecture, or conjure up, some other scheme or principle of pardon; you may conceive of God as dealing with the sinner, and delivering him from the punishment due to his iniquities, without these iniquities being expiated, without the penalty incurred by them being exacted, without the law of which they are transgressors being relieved from the stain of dishonor which they had cast upon it, without any costly sacrifice, any solemn propitiation, any priceless ransom. But whatever this transaction might be, it would not be remission. Granting that it were quite possible for God to let the sinner off; to wipe out, by a mere arbitrary decree, and without any satisfaction to divine justice, the debt which the sinner had contracted; to cease from His anger toward His enemies and return to a state of friendship; to say, Your sins be forgiven you, you have nothing now to fear; all this, 'without shedding of blood,' without any sacrifice, or atonement, or expiation: still all this, whatever it might amount to, does not amount to remission. Call it what you please: be it what it may; it is not remission. It may be held up as an equivalent for it; it may be in room and lieu of it; it may be all that multitudes care to inquire after, or have ever felt the need of, or troubled themselves to seek. But, however possible it might be on God's part, however satisfactory it might be on their part, it is not remission. It may look like it. It may seem to carry with it all that the unenlightened have any thought of when thinking of remission; but real remission it is not. Without shedding of blood it is not remission. "What the enlightened conscience of an anxious inquirer longs for is 'remission' —remission of sin. And what is that? It is removal of guilt; removal of liability to the wrath of God; removal of Criminality or ill-desert. It is a sentence of 'Not Guilty.' It is a recognition of blamelessness before the Holy One of Israel; a position and relation toward God, therefore, in which His wrath would be undue, unrighteous, impossible. That would be Remission." We must not anticipate the ground which we hope to cover in later chapters, except to say here that, the great problem which confronted God, and which we make so bold as to say could never have been solved by either human or angelic intelligence, was, How mercy might act freely without justice being insulted, or how justice might exact its full due without mercy's hands being tied. A marvelous, perfect and completely satisfactory solution to this problem has been found and furnished in the Satisfaction made to God by the mediatorial Redeemer. It is in this satisfaction that "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). It is this satisfaction which has enabled God to be "just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). 4. THE GLORY OF GOD Rightly has it been said that "The ultimate reason and motive of all God's actions are within Himself. Since God is infinite, eternal and unchanging, that which was His first motive in creating the universe must ever continue to be the ultimate motive or Chief end in every act concerned in its preservation and government. But God's first motive must have been just the exercise of His own essential perfections, and in their exercise the manifestation of their excellence. This was the only end which could have been chosen by the Divine mind in the beginning, before the existence of any other object" (The Atonement, Dr. A. A. Hodge). The Scriptures are very explicit on this point, "The Lord hath made all things, for himself" (Prov. 16:4). "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36). "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). The ultimate motive, therefore, which moved God to

ordain Christ as Satisfaction for the failed responsibilities of His people must have been the Divine glory, and not the effects intended to be produced in the creature. But glory is manifested excellence, and moral excellence is manifested only by being exercised. The infinite justice and love of God both find their highest conceivable exercise in the sacrifice of His own Son as the Substitute of guilty men. God did ordain to have other sons beside Christ (Rom. 8:29), but it was in order that they might behold His glory (John 17:24), and that He might "be glorified in them" (John 17:10). To ordain Christ to come into this world as Man, only upon the occasion of man's sin and for the work of redemption, would be to subject Christ unto us, and to make our good the "end" of God's action. Such a conception is not only extremely absurd, but terribly impious. Adam was not made for Eve, but Eve for Adam; and as the woman is "the glory of the man" (1 Cor. 11:7) so the saints are called "the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 8:23); and as the saints are Christ's, so is Christ, the Mediator, "God's" (1 Cor. 3:23).

5. THE COVENANT OF GOD Though we have made this a heading distinct from the preceding four, yet we would point out that it is in the Everlasting Covenant we find the will, the love, the righteousness, the glory of God, united, as the moving cause or causes of the perfect provision found in the Satisfaction of Christ. As we have insisted in previous paragraphs, had God so pleased He might never have created a single being to admire His perfections. When creatures were admitted to that wondrous spectacle, and then became guilty of dishonoring Him, He might have further revealed Himself only in wrath, pouring out the vials of His indignation upon the spot which they inhabited, and turning it into a scene of desolation. What would be the loss of a world to Him in whose eyes it is as nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity (Isa. 40:17)? It follows from these premises, the truth of which cannot be gainsaid, that the plan which God designed for the salvation of His elect, who by nature also shared in the ruins of Adam's fall, originated not only in His sovereign grace, but was determined solely by His own imperial will. Therefore, in contemplating the work of redemption we need to ascend to its source, and begin with the consideration of that eternal agreement between the Persons of the Godhead, on which the whole dispensation of grace to fallen men is founded. That agreement is spoken of in the Scripture as "The everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20).

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