

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 8. Its Nature-Concluded

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Transcript

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We have pointed out in the preceding chapters that the particular aspect of Christ's Satisfaction which is now before us constitutes the very heart of this mighty subject. As the physical heart is to the human body, so is the nature of the Atonement to the whole of this wondrous theme. When a man's heart becomes seriously affected, the whole of his constitution suffers. In like manner, when we err in our views of the precise character of Christ's obedience and sufferings, the whole of our system of truth suffers injury in exact proportion. The acid test of a theologian's views and a preacher's capability to expound the Gospel, is his orthodoxy at this particular point. Hence, because, this part of the Truth is of such vital importance we have prayerfully sought to examine it with sevenfold thoroughness, and set before our readers at some length the results of our investigation. First, we have shown that the work of Christ was federal in its character: that is, Christ became legally one of His people. He came here not to strangers, but to His "brethren" (Heb. 2:12). He came here not to procure a people for Himself, but to secure a people already His (Eph. 1:4; Matthew 1:21). The place we occupied was "under the law." We were placed under it at creation, and perfect obedience was made the condition of our well-being. By our fall in Adam we became incapable of obeying the demands of the law and subject to its unrelaxable penalty. The law remained over us, therefore, as an inexorable taskmaster, demanding the impossible, and as the organ of immutable justice, insisting upon our death. Therefore to be our Savior the Son of God was "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4): He was, by God's ordination, transferred to that position. Thus, the place He took was our law-place. In taking that place He necessarily assumed all our responsibilities: obedience as a condition of life, suffering as a penal consequence of disobedience. Second, we have shown that the work of Christ was vicarious in its character. Substitution has been thus defined: "A 'substitute' is one who does or suffers the same thing which the person or persons for whom he is substituted would have done or suffered." The Scriptures teach us plainly that Christ's obedience was as truly vicarious as was His suffering, and that He reconciled us to the Father by the one as well as the other. It is for this reason we have chosen the term "Satisfaction" in preference to the more popular "Atonement." "The word Atonement signifies only the expiation of our guilt by Christ's vicarious sufferings, but expresses nothing concerning the relation which His obedience sustains to our salvation, as that meritorious condition upon which the Divine favor and the promised reward have by covenant been suspended. On the other hand, the word Satisfaction exactly expresses all that Christ has done as our Substitute, in our stead, and for our sakes, to the end of satisfying in our behalf the federal demands of the law, and of securing for us the rewards

conditioned upon their fulfillment. His whole work was of the nature of a satisfaction" (A. A. Hodge). Third, we have shown that the work of Christ was penal in its character. This follows of inevitable necessity. In becoming one with His criminal people, Christ entered their law place before God. In acting as the Substitute of His people, Christ must receive that which was due them from God. Because the sins of His Church were transferred to Christ, He must be paid their wages. Because He took our law place, the curse of the law must fall upon Him. Because He was "made sin" for us, the sword of Divine justice must smite Him. As 1 Corinthians 15:3 declares, the God-man not only died "for us," but "Christ died for our sins," which was only made possible by our sins having been federally placed upon Him. Because our sins were imputed to Him, the wrath of God fell upon Him, and He was visited with all that our sins merited. We are now ready to show —

4. IT WAS A SACRIFICIAL WORK

From the many passages which set forth this aspect of Christ's redemption, we may cite the following. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" (Isa. 53:10). "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor" (Eph. 5:2). "Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice... for this he did once, when he offered up himself" (Heb. 7:27). "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14). Ere attempting to define the character of Christ's sacrifice, let us first remind ourselves that He presented Himself a sacrifice to God by covenant agreement. As we are told in Romans 3:25, "Whom God hath foreordained a propitiation through faith in his blood." God can be pleased only with that which He has appointed. The Everlasting Covenant furnishes the key to many a verse of Scripture. For instance, when Christ was about to go to the Cross, He said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified" (John 13:31). But how could that be? Was it not rather His degradation? No, for the eternal Three had assigned to the God-man the work of mediation, and that was a high honor. So the Son of man viewed it. It is our "glory" too to bow to God's will and keep His appointments. Second, though Christ offered Himself a sacrifice according to Divine appointment, it was also by His own free consent. As in all our obedience there are two principal ingredients to the true and right constitution of it, namely, the matter of the obedience itself, and the principle or fountain of it in us; in other words, the deed, and the will behind it — which latter God accepts in us, oftentimes without (2 Cor. 8:12) and always more than the outward deed — so in Christ's obedience, which is both the pattern and measure of ours, there are these two eminent parts which complete it — the obedience itself, His willingness thereto. First, Christ was willing from all eternity. This is clear from the Covenant, for that is a mutual agreement between two parties. It is also necessarily implied in His being made "a Surety" (Heb. 7:22), an undertaking on His part: a surety is a plighter of his troth, by "striking hands" as the phrase is in the original: Proverbs 22:26. Again; His willingness from everlasting unto the time of His incarnation is evidenced from Proverbs 8:30, which shows in what or whom He delighted all that while. Again: His willingness is seen in those words "He humbled Himself" (Phil. 2:8) actively, not "He was humbled," passively. Remarkably and blessedly is this also brought out in Hebrews 10:5-7. There we find His dedication of Himself unto His great work. "When He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. . . Lo, I come. . . to do thy will, O God." Here is the remarkable thing: the Holy Spirit has here been pleased to make known to us (as the great Secretary of the Covenant) the very words the Son used as He left the Father's presence to come to earth. To which we may add — amazing, heart-thrilling fact — the Holy Spirit has also been pleased to reveal to us the first words which were uttered by the Father when His Son returned to Him, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand" (Ps. 110:1). The point we are now dealing with is so precious that we would feign dwell upon it. There was no constraint laid upon Christ: all that He did was done freely and gladly. From the beginning of the days of His flesh He said, "Thou art my God from my

mother's belly" (Ps. 22:9), and that, by His perfect choice. So too as He neared the end He could say, "I was not rebellious neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:5,6). Yes, Christ "gave Himself" (Gal. 2:20) for us. Third, as it was of the Father's appointment, and the God man's willing consent that He presented Himself a sacrifice, so also was it by the Spirit's agency. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God" (Heb. 9:14). The discharge of His entire Messianic office was by the enduement of the Holy Spirit. The very title, "Christ," means "the anointed One," and was given to Him because of the peculiar unction of the Spirit conferred upon Him, an unction which was unique in nature and degree. At the beginning of His public ministry He declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Isa. 61:1). He was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1), and the same Spirit which led Him into the wilderness (Matthew 4:1) also led Him as a willing Victim to the Cross. We shall now take note of the various characteristics of Christ's sacrifice: A. Christ's Sacrifice Was a Ransoming One "There are three several generic forms of conception under which the work wrought by Christ for the salvation of men is set forth. These are (a) that of an expiatory offering for sin: (b) that of the redemption of the life and liberty of a captive by the payment of a ransom in his stead, and (c) the satisfaction of the law by the vicarious fulfillment of its demands. These different conceptions are designed both to limit and to supplement each other in a manner strictly analogous to the combination of the different perceptions of the same object by the different bodily senses. The sense of sight, although when educated in connection with the concurrent and mutually limiting and supplementing perceptions of the organs of touch and hearing, is unmatched as to the extent and accuracy of its information, yet would, if left to itself never have risen beyond an infant's vague perception of a surface variously shaded, without any sense of relation in space. "All our knowledge of the material world, considered as an object of sense, arises from the education of our minds in the use of our bodily senses in combination, and the habits of judgment and inference to which are thus produced. Men learn to interpret the impressions made upon them through their eyes by means of other impressions made upon them in connection with the same object, through the senses of touch and hearing, and vice versa. In like manner our knowledge of the true nature of the work of Christ and its bearing upon us results from all the various forms in which the Scriptures set it forth in combination, each at once limiting, modifying and supplementing all the others. "It should be noticed, moreover, that the Scriptures do not present these several views as different sides of the same house to be taken in succession, but habitually present them in combination, as lights and shades blend together in the same picture in producing the same intelligible expression. Thus, in the same sentences it is said, 'We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.' 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13). That is, He redeems us not in the sense of making a pecuniary payment in cancellation of our debts, but by His vicarious suffering, like the bleeding sacrifices of the Mosaic ritual, of the penalty due our sins." "The fact here noticed, that the same inspired sentences represent Christ at the same instance and in the same relations as a 'ransom' and as a 'sin-offering,' and as made to endure 'the curse of the law' for us, is worthy of careful study. The teaching of Scripture is not that Christ is a sacrifice, and a ransom, and a bearer of the curse of the law, but it is that He is that particular species of sacrifice which is a ransom; that His redemption is of that nature which is effected by His bearing the curse of the law in our stead, and that He redeems us by offering Himself a bleeding sacrifice to God. Thus, the teaching of the Holy Spirit is as precise as any ecclesiastical theory of Atonement. Christ saves us by being a sacrifice. He is specifically a sin offering in the Jewish sense. More specifically yet, the offering of Himself a ransom for us, and to His bearing the curse of the law in our stead, and the design and effects of this ransom-paying, curse bearing sacrifice of His, that He redeems us from the curse of the law. It is not any kind of a sacrifice, but a ransom

paying, curse-bearing sacrifice. It is not any kind of redemption, but a sacrificial redemption" (A. A. Hodge). That the sacrifice of Christ was a ransoming one is clear, first, from Matthew 20:28, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." This remarkable declaration calls for our closest attention. Christ came here not to be ministered unto as the Lord of all, but to give His life, not only in and by dying, but throughout the whole course of His earthly service. The word "give" emphasizes the fact that He acted voluntarily, without compulsion of any kind. The reason for His saying that He came to give His "life" or "soul" appears from the sacrificial language of Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls." The life of the typical sacrifice represented the life of its offerer: the death-sentence executed on the former was what the latter had incurred. That was the fundamental idea of all the Old Testament sacrifices. Christ came here to give His life "a ransom." This term necessarily connotes that the many for whom the ransom was paid were captives, in bondage, the slaves of sin (Titus 3:3), and as such, obnoxious to God's holy displeasure. There is an important distinction between "ransom" and "redemption": the former is the price paid to secure the latter. The first mention of a "ransom" in Scripture is in Exodus 21:30, where a valuable price was required for the deliverance of one who, through guilt, was worthy of death, cf. Exodus 30:12, etc. Christ's ransom was paid to satisfy God's justice: a life for a life; the ransom being a penal infliction. Christ gave His life a "ransom for many": the Greek preposition is "and" which, except in the few instances where it means "against," is always used in a substitutionary sense. His life was not "given" in any vague, indefinite way for the good of others, but was a specific quid pro quo, dying in the very room of His people. The "many" is in contrast from the one life. "The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). The prominent idea of "ransom" is that of payment, of vicarious substitution, of one thing standing in the place of another. No figure can so fully convey this idea as of one drawn from purchases with money. The very idea of purchase necessarily involves that of substitution. I go into a shop and ask the price of a book. It is one dollar. I put down the money, and I am at liberty at once to take up the book. It is mine. On what principle? Of substitution. I substitute the money for the book. In this way Christ bought His people. To the Corinthian saints Paul wrote, "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold. . . but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). Sinners are the prisoners of Divine justice. True, they are the captives of the Devil; but who delivered them up to him? The Lord: Satan is but the executioner of His righteous sentence. And their salvation is not a simple discharge without compensation. Neither is the salvation of guilty sinners an act of power only, effected by the interposition of an arm full of might to secure their escape. Gratuitous favor and all mighty power are both concerned in it, but there is more: there is a price paid, a ransom laid down, every way equivalent to the redemption for which it is offered; and that price was Christ's satisfaction. B. Christ's Sacrifice Was a Priestly One This has been denied by Socinians, and it is sad to see those who believe in the Deity of Christ adopting this vain reasoning upon the sacerdotal nature of our Savior's oblation. Through a misunderstanding of Hebrews 8:4, they insist that Christ only entered upon His priestly office consequent upon His ascension. That Christ was High Priest and acted as such while He was here on earth is abundantly plain from Hebrews 2:17, for He made "propitiation" for the sins of His people on the Cross! It is true that others besides priests offered sacrifices to God in Old Testament times, but the New Testament represents Christ not only as Priest, but as the great "high Priest" of His people, and if the character, purpose and scope of that office be interpreted (as it must be) in the light of the inspired types, then there is no room left for doubt as to the meaning of the anti type. Israel's high priest represented the people before God. Taken from among men, he was ordained to act in the behalf of men in those matters which related to God, so that he might bring near to God both gifts and sacrifices (Heb. 5:1). As the

general character of the prophet was that of one qualified and authorized to speak from God to men, so the general idea of the priest is that of one qualified and authorized to treat in matters of men with God. The high priest was he in whom the entire priesthood culminated, and he, especially, acted in all respects as the literal representative of the entire holy (separated) nation. First, he bore the names of each tribe graven on the stones on his shoulders, and on the breastplate over his heart (Exodus 28:9-29). Second, he made atonement in behalf of all the people, confessing over the head of the scapegoat all their sins (Leviticus 16:15-21). Third, if he sinned, it was regarded as the sin of all the people (Leviticus 4:3). His chief function was to offer bleeding sacrifices for propitiation and to make intercession for the people. The antitypical fulfillment of this is shown us in the epistle to the Hebrews, where Christ is called Priest six times, and high Priest twelve times. Let us, very briefly, point out the several details of this. First, in Hebrews 2:17, 18 we are told that Christ became incarnate "That he might be a merciful and faithful high Priest," etc. Second, in 5:4-6 we learn that Christ was chosen by God to this office. Third, 5:7; 8:3; 9:11-15, 25-28; 10:12-19, etc., show that Christ literally discharged the functions of a priest, offering to God a sacrifice for all His people, which, through God's acceptance thereof, brought to an end all the typical offerings. Conclusive proof of this was furnished by God in rending the veil of the temple, thereby setting aside the whole system of the Levitical priesthood. The priestly sacrifice of Christ had now superseded theirs. That Christ was high Priest on earth is also clear from Hebrews 4:14: "Seeing then we have a great high Priest, that is passed into the heavens" etc. Aaron was high priest when he entered the holy of holies, yet he was also a high priest before, or he could not have entered at all. If Christ be a priest He must have a sacrifice, for the very nature of the sacerdotal office required it. The entire employment of the high priest, as priest, consisted in offering sacrifice, with the performance of those things which did necessarily precede and follow it. Now Christ was both Priest and Sacrifice. He offered Himself to God. What could be plainer than Ephesians 5:2, "Christ. . . hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor"? He had to do with God as He stood in the relation and respect of a "sacrifice." In His dual person He was Priest: in His human nature, He was the sacrifice offered. In the term "flesh" — "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3) — the Holy Spirit refers to the whole manhood of Christ, and it was the "sacrifice" for sin by which sin was "condemned." "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer" (Heb. 8:3). And what was it that He did "offer"? His "own blood" (Heb. 9:12), His "body" (Heb. 10:10), His "soul" or "life" (Isa. 53:10), "Himself" (Heb. 9:14). In Christ's sacrifice there was an "altar" too, namely, His Godhead: "The altar that sanctifieth the gift" (Matthew 23:19). The Deity of Christ not only sustained and strengthened His human nature in being a sacrifice therein, but it also gave merit and efficacy to His sacrifice. How did that one sacrifice avail for all the sins of all God's people, but from the fact that He who offered up Himself was God as well as man! Christ abides in His office of priesthood (Heb. 8:1), not to offer fresh sacrifice (10:12), but to intercede (7:25). C. Christ's Sacrifice Was a Propitiatory One By Adam's fall a sad breach was made between God and man. Sin greatly incensed the holy God against His rebellious creatures, nay, there was a mutual enmity constrained between them. On the one hand, we read of God, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5), "But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, He fought against them" (Isa. 63:10). Of man we read, "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7); "You that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled" (Col. 1:21). Now Christ came here to effect reconciliation between these alienated parties, to bring God and men together again in amity and love. By His bloodshedding, Christ appeased the righteous wrath of God. By His sacrifice, He pacified the claims of Divine justice. Some have asked, How could the elect be "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), seeing that God always loved them (Jer. 31:3)? In the language of John Owen we reply, "He loved us, in

respect of the free purpose of His will to send Christ to redeem us and satisfy for our sins; He was angry with us, in respect of His violated law, and provoked justice by sin." The leading New Testament scriptures which present this particular aspect of Christ's sacrifice are the following: "Whom God hath foreordained a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness" (Rom. 3:25). "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God [not by the Holy Spirit's work in us, nor by our laying down the weapons of our warfare but] by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10). We were "reconciled" through Christ's averting God's anger from us and procuring our acceptance in His legal favor. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 5:18). "And having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). "That he might be a merciful and faithful high Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). "If any one sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). Now the above passages are best understood in the light of the Old Testament types. There we read, "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation and make an atonement for them: For there is wrath gone out from the Lord; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded. . . and made an atonement for the people. . . and the plague was stayed" (Numbers 16:46-48). Again, we read, "Lord said to the Temanite My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends... therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept," etc. (Job 42:7-9). What could be plainer? The wrath of God was appeased by bloodshedding! It remains to be pointed out that the Hebrew word for "atonement" and the Greek word for "propitiation" are one and the same.

D. Christ's Sacrifice Was an Expiatory One The whole of Christ's humiliation and suffering from His birth to the Cross were invested with a priestly and sacrificial character, as constituting His once-offering up of Himself a sacrifice, as propitiatory of God and expiatory of His people's sins; yet the emphasis of Scripture shows that Christ's oblation of Himself as victim was principally manifested and concentrated in His pouring out of His soul unto death. Faith is directed to the Cross, as presenting not merely the historical terminus and climax, but the logical and indispensable completion of all that preceded, for sin not only entails suffering but death. "Propitiation" defines the bearing which Christ's sacrifice had Godwards: it placated Him. "Expiation" has reference to the bearing which Christ's sacrifice had manwards: it removed the sins of His people. "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). "Remission" is a judicial term, and signifies the annulling of guilt, the removal of all ground of punishment. "Once in the end of the age hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). Christ has so "put away" all the sin of His people that they are perfectly and finally acquitted in the high court of God, so that no charge can evermore be laid against them (Rom. 8:33). Blessedly and gloriously has the Old Testament type been fulfilled, "On that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Lev. 16:30). Thus are God's believing children able to say, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). This was one of the chief ends of Christ's Satisfaction saint wards: to take upon Him the sins of His people, and so atone for them that an end was made of them. Those who are not sheltered beneath the precious blood of Christ have to say, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Ps. 90:8). But they who, by marvelous sovereign grace, have been brought to trust in the Lamb, may exclaim, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). Our guilt has all been annulled. We have been completely freed from a deserved punishment. No longer is there a single charge on God's docket against us. Proof of this is that, "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). Therefore "unto them that look

for Him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). Hallelujah!

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