

The Threefold Cord

by P.T. Forsyth

Christ's work is a threefold cord of triumphant, satisfactory, and regenerative aspects, which co-ordinate to create a new life in us and satisfy God's holiness.

Scripture: John 17:19, Romans 5:19, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:21, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 2:24

Topics: "Christ's Work", "Sanctification"

Description

P.T. Forsyth preaches about the three great aspects of the work of Christ: its triumphant aspect, satisfactory aspect, and regenerative aspect. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the unity of these aspects in Christ's work, as seen in 1 Corinthians 1:30. Forsyth stresses the need for a comprehensive view of Christ's work, highlighting the significance of His perfect obedience of holy love in overcoming evil, satisfying God's holiness, and sanctifying humanity. He challenges the separation of justification and sanctification, advocating for a balanced understanding that connects Christ's work on the Cross with both the deliverance from sin's power and the regeneration of humanity.

Transcript

There are three great aspects of the work of Christ which have in turn held the attention of the Church, and come home with special force to its spiritual situation at a special time. There are:

1. Its triumphant aspect; 2. Its satisfactory aspect; 3. Its regenerative aspect.

The first emphasizes the finality of our Lord's victory over the evil power of devil; the second, the finality of His satisfaction, expiation, or atonement presented to the holy power of God; and the third the finality of His sanctifying or new-creative influence on the soul of man. The first marked the Early Church, the second the Medieval and Reformation Church, while the third marks the Modern Church. And if you fall back upon the New Testament, where all the subsequent development of the Church is in the germ, as a philosophy might be packed in a phrase, you will find those three strands wonderfully and prophetically entwined in 1 Cor. 1:30, where it is said that Christ is made unto us (2) justification; (3) sanctification; and (1) redemption.

The whole history of the doctrine in the Church may be viewed as the exegesis by time of this great text of the Spirit. Now, it is not meant that in the period specially marked by one of these aspects the other two were absent. In various of the medieval theologians you find all three. And it is a good test of the native

aptitude of any theologian, and of his evangelical grasp, that he should find them all necessary to express the fullness of the vast work, and its adequacy to anything so great and manifold as the soul.

But what we do not find in the classic theologians of the past is the co-ordination of the three aspects under one comprehensive idea, one organic principle, corresponding to the complete unity of Christ's person, who did the work. We do not find such a unitary view of the work as we should expect when we reflect that it was the work of a personality so complete as Christ, and so absolute as the God who acted in Christ. Yet we must strive after such a view, by the very nature of our faith.

A mere composite or eclectic theology means a distracted faith. A creed just nailed together means Churches that cannot draw together. We cannot, at least the Church cannot, rest healthily upon medley and mortised aspects of the one thing which connects our one soul with the one God in one moral world. We cannot rest in unresolved views of reconciliation. As the reconciliation comes to pervade our whole being, and as we answer it with heart and strength and mind, we become more and more impatient of fragmentary ways of understanding it.

We crave, and we move, to see that the first aspect is the condition of the second, and the second of the third, and that they all condition each other in a living interaction. Now the object I have in view in this lecture is to press a former point as furnishing this unity - that the active and effective principle in the work of Christ was the perfect obedience of holy love which He offered amidst the conditions of sin, death, and judgment. The potent thing was not the suffering but the sanctify, and not the sympathetic confession of our sin so much as the practical confession of God's holiness.

This principle (I hope to show) co-ordinates the various aspects which have been distorted by isolation. This one action of the holy Savior's total person was, on its various sides, the destruction of evil, the satisfaction of God, and the sanctification of men. And it is in this moral medium of holiness (if I may so say) that these three effects pass and play into each other with a spiritual interpenetration. Thus Christ's complete victory over the evil power or principle. His redemption (1), is the obverse of His regenerating and sanctifying effect on us (3).

To deliver us from evil is not simply to take us out of hell, it is to take us into heaven. Christ does not simply pluck us out of the hands of Satan, He does so by giving us to God. He does not simply release us from slavery, He commits us in the act to a positive liberty. He does not simply cancel the charge against us in court and bid us walk out of jail, He meets us at the prison-door and puts us in a new way of life. His forgiveness is not simply retrospective, it is, in the same act, the gift of eternal life.

Our evil is overcome by good. We are won from sin by an act which at the same time makes us not simply innocent but holy. So also we must see that the third - our regenerate sanctification - is the condition of the second - the complete satisfaction of God. The only complete satisfaction that can be made to a holy God from the sinful side is the sinner's restored obedience, his return to holiness. Now, the cheap and superficial way of putting that is to say that penitent amendment is the only satisfaction we can give to a grieved God.

But future amendment does no more than the duty of the future hour. And rivers of water from our eyes will not wash out the guilt of the past; nor will they undo the evil we have set afloat in souls far gone beyond our reach or control. Yet it remains true that nothing can atone to holiness but holiness. And it must be the holiness of the sinner. It must also be an obedience of the kind required by the whole situation, moral and spiritual. It must be the obedience not of improvement but of reconciliation, not of

laborious amendment but of regenerated faith.

But faith in what? Faith in One who alone contains in Himself a holy obedience so perfect as to meet the holiness of God on the scale of our sin; but One also who, by the same obedience, has the power to reproduce in man the kind of holiness which alone can please God after all that has come and gone. No suffering can atone. No pain can satisfy a holy God; no death, as death. Yet satisfied He must be; else the freedom of grace becomes but an arbitrary and non-holy thing, a thing instinctive to the divine nature instead of a victory of the divine will.

Also consider this: much of your difficulty in connection with satisfaction will yield if you keep in view that what we are concerned with is not the satisfaction of a demand but of a Person, not of a claim by God but of the heart and soul of God. I know it is easier to discuss and adjust statutory claims than to grasp the manifold action of a living and eternal Person. So I am afraid I must be very theological for a moment and tax you accordingly. The chief reason why so many hate theology is because it taxes; and there is nothing we shrink from like spiritual toil.

But let the choice and earnest spirit consider this. The essence of holiness is God's perfect satisfaction, His perfect repose in eternal fullness. And the Christian plea is that this is Self-satisfaction, in the sublimest sense of the phrase. For us, mostly, the word has an ignoble sense. But that is only because what we meet most is an exclusive self-satisfaction, an individual self-sufficiency. But when we have an entirely inclusive self-satisfaction, an eternal and complete adequate to Himself in the most critical situation, we have the whole native fullness of God blessed for ever, with men beneath the shadow of His wing.

The perpetual act of holy God is a perpetual satisfaction or accord between His nature and His will at every juncture, and a satisfaction from His own infinite holy resource - a Self-satisfaction. God is always the author of His own satisfaction; that is to say, His holiness is always equal to its own atonement. God in the Son is the perfect satisfaction and joy of God in the Father; and God holy in the sinful Cross is the perfect satisfaction of God the holy in the sinless heavens.

Satisfaction there must be in God's own nature, whether under the conditions of perfect obedience in a harmonious world, or under those of obedience jarred and a world distraught. God has power to secure that the perfect holy obedience of heaven shall not be eternally destroyed by the disobedience of earth. He has power to satisfy Himself, and maintain His holiness infrangible, even in face of a world in arms. But satisfied He must be. For an unsatisfied God, a dissatisfied God, would be no God.

He would reflect the distraction of the world, and so succumb to it. But a holy God could be satisfied by neither pain nor death, but by holiness alone. The atoning thing is not obedient suffering but suffering obedience. He could be satisfied and rejoiced only by hallowing of His name, by perfect and obedient answer to His holy heart from amid conditions of pain, death, and judgment. Holy obedience alone, unto death, can satisfy the Holy Lord. Now as to this obedience mark two things. 1.

It includes (we saw) the idea that in obedience Christ accepted the judgment holiness must pass upon sin, and did so in a way that confessed it as holy from amidst the deepest experience of it, the experience not of a spectator but a victim. His obedience was not merely a fine, perfect, and mighty harmony of His own with God's blessed will; but it was the acceptance on man's behalf of that judgment which sin had entailed, and the confession on man's behalf in a tremendous act that the judgment was good and holy.

For the holiness of God makes two demands; first, for an answering holiness in love, and second, for a judgment on those who do not answer but defy. And Christ met both, in one and the same act. He was judged as one who, being made sin, was never sinful, but absolutely well-pleasing to God. 2. And the second point is this: The satisfactory obedience must be obedience from the race that rebelled. Its holiness must atone for its sin. But how can that possibly be? Can it be by mere amendment from us?

Can we bring any amendment to atone for the past and secure its remission? Could the race do it? Solidary in its sin by its moral unity, could the race earn a solidary salvation? Could you conceive of mankind as one vast sinful soul repenting with a like unity, turning like the prodigal, and deputing the most illustrious spiritual hero of its number to offer its repentance to God in Jesus Christ? If the supposition were possible, that might indeed be a certain welcome offering made to God's holiness; but it would not be made by it.

It would be something beyond the resources of holiness, and God would not be the Savior. He would accept more sacrifice than He had power to make. And it would make the action of Christ a power conferred on Him by self-saved man instead of inherent in Him from God. His commission would be but to God, not from God. And how should a sinful race offer from its own damaged resources what would satisfy the holiness of God? Or, if repentance could satisfy holiness, how are we to know how much, how deep, repentance would do it, and leave us sure it was done?

The holiness that atones, though it return from the race that rebelled, must therefore be the gift of the holiness atoned. For if holiness could be satisfied by anything outside itself it would not be absolutely holy. So if holiness can be satisfied with nothing but holiness it can only be with a holiness which itself creates. God alone can create in us the holiness that will please Him. And this He has done in Jesus Christ incarnate. But it is in Jesus Christ as the creator of man's holiness, not as the organ of it, as man's sanctifier, and nor merely man's delegate.

Christ is our reconciler because on the Cross He was our redeemer from sin's power into no mere independence or courage or safety, but into real holiness; because the same act that redeems us produces holiness, and presents us in this holiness to God and His communion. The holiness of Christ is the satisfying thing to God, yet not because of the beauty of holiness offered to His sight in the perfect character of Christ. We are not saved either by Christ's ethical character or our own, but by His person's creative power and work on us.

Christ's holiness is the satisfying thing to God, because it is not only the means but also the anticipation of our holiness, because it carries all our future holiness latent in it and to God's eye patent; because in His saving act He is the creative power of which our new life is the product. It is not only that Christ conquered for Himself and emerged with His soul for a prey, but, He being what He was, His victory contained ours. If He died all died. It was not only that all the sin of the world, pointed to its worst, could not make Him a sinner.

It was that by all the holiness of eternity He had power to make the worst sinners saints. Of course, there is no way to sanctification but by deliverance from sin, by being "unsinful." But no sinful man can "unsin" himself, however he amend. It can only be done by the creation in him of a new life. It can only be done by the sinless Son of God, who lived from eternity in God's holiness, entered man, lived that holiness out in the face of sin, and thus not only broke the evil power by living it down but created that holiness in us by living it in.

What is our redemption is thus also our reconciliation. If the atoning thing is holiness (which it is), and not suffering (which it is not), then Christ atoned by an act which created a new holiness in us and not a new suffering. The act which overcame the world intensively for good and all was also the act which slowly masters the world in the extensive sense. His moral and spiritual victory was so deep and thorough that it gives Him power to subdue other consciences to His holy self, world without end.

There is an old word used in this connection which there is much disposition at the present to recall and reclaim. It is the word surety, of which some of our fathers were so fond. The word substitute has unfortunate and misleading suggestions, and it has practically been dropped in favor of a word more ethical and more constitutional, like representative. But even that word misleads us to think of Christ as the spiritual protagonist of a democracy, drawing His power from those He represents; and it muffles the truth that His relation to us is royal and not elective, that it is creative and not merely expository.

He does not express the natural repentance of the old humanity but creates the penitent faith of the new - "the new man created unto holiness." It is not easy to find a word that has no defect, since all words, even the greatest, are made from the dust and spring from our sandy passions, earthly needs, and fleeting thoughts; and they are hard to stretch to the measure of eternal things without breaking under us somewhere. The word surety itself gives way at a great strain - as does guarantee.

Christ's function for us was not simply an assurance to God, from one who knew us well, that for all our aberrations we were sound and could be trusted at bottom. His confession of us was not simply His expression of His conviction, as deep as life, that man, though tough and slow, would in the long-run turn, obey, and confess if properly treated from above. It was not a pledge to God, or an encouragement to man, that Humanity would come right when experience had done its work on his native goodness and his spiritual nature, so much deeper than his sin.

It was not a warranty to God that human nature would at last recover its spiritual balance, of which recovery Christ might point to Himself as being an earnest, a prelude, a classic illustration. It was not that Christ staked His insight into the deep nature of this most excellent creature man that he would one day rise from his swine, and return from his rebellion, and fall into the Father's arms. Such poor suggestions as these spring from our common and commercial use of a word like surety or guarantee.

As if Christ were a third party between two who did not quite believe in each other. As if God by this aid might be led to foresee that man would come to himself in a faith and repentance distant but certain, might credit it to him in advance, but might pardon on that ground. That would destroy grace. And it would give man the satisfaction of satisfying God if He would but give him time to collect the wherewithal. Christ is no third party, no arbitrator, no moral broker. And He is not the first installment of man's return to God, its harbinger.

In no such sense is He our surety before God. Because His work is not one of insight but of regeneration. It did not turn on His genius for reading us, but His power to create us anew. He Himself is the creator in us of what He promises for us. Any surety that Christ gives to God for man is really God swearing by Himself; it is the Creator's self-assurance of His own regenerative power. Christ, as the Eternal Son of Holy God, can offer Him a holiness which creates and includes that of the race, and does not simply prophesy it.

We might put it thus: Christ alone in His sinless perfection can feel all God's holiness in judging sin; and therefore He alone could confess and honor it. No sinful man could do that; and therefore no sinful man

could duly repent. The value of repentance is always in proportion to the sense of God's holiness. To confess that holiness is the great postulate in order to confess sin. And the race could duly confess its sin and repent only if there arose in it One who by a perfect and impenitent holiness in Himself, and by His organic unity with us, could create such holiness in the sinful as should make the new life one long repentance transcended by faith and thankful joy.

This was and is Christ's work. And the satisfaction to God, as it was certainly not His suffering, was also more than the spectacle of His own holy soul presented to God. It was that holy soul (the holier as He faced and conquered evil ever growing more black and bitter) - it was that holy soul seen by God as the cause and creator of the race's confession, both of holiness and of sin, in a Church of the reborn. The satisfaction to God was Christ, not as an isolated character, or in an act wholly outside us and our responsive union with Him; but it was Christ as the author of our sanctification and repentance.

Our repentance and our sanctity are of saving value before God only as produced by the creative holiness of Christ. Christ creates our holiness because of His own sanctification of Himself - John 17:19 - and His complete victory over the evil power in a life-experience of moral conflict. You wish perhaps here to ask me this question: Is then the sanctity of a Unitarian who rejects any satisfaction by Christ, any atonement, as the ground of man's holiness, is that sanctity of no account before God?

Is the true repentance of those who do not know of an atoning Christianity of little price with Him? Far from it. But from our point of view we must regard them as incomplete stages, which draw their value with God from a subliminal union with that completed and holy offering of Christ which He never ceases to see, however far it be beneath our conscious light. When therefore we speak of Christ as our Surety, we mean much more than would be meant by a mere sponsorship. We suppose a solidary union of faith created by the Savior in the sinner, which not only impresses him but incorporates him with Christ.

All turns upon that spiritual solidarity. All turns upon the reality of that new life for which Paul had to invent a new phrase - "in Christ." A tremendous phrase, like that other, "the New Creation" - and hardly intelligible to a youthful or impressionist Christianity. The real ground of our forgiveness is not our confession of sin, and not even Christ's confession of our sin, but His agonized confession of God's holiness, and its absorbing effect on us. To be in grace we must be found in Him.

Our new penitent life is His creation. He contains the principle and power of our forgiveness. And it comes home to us only as we abide in Him. In Him, and only in Him, the normal holy man, the man holy with all the holiness of God, have we the living power of release from guilt, escape from sin, repentance, faith, and newness of life. We are justified only as we are incorporate (not clothed) in the perfect righteousness of Christ, our Regenerator, and not in proportion as the righteousness of Christ has made palpable way in us.

It is not as Christ is in us that we are saved, but as we are in Christ. It is this being in Christ for our justification that makes justification necessarily work out to sanctification, and forgiveness be one with eternal life. We shall be misled even by what is true in the representative aspect of Christ unless we grasp how much more He is, how creative He is, how the solidarity involved in His representation is due to His own act of self-identification and not to natural identity with us.

We must take quite seriously that supreme word of a "new creation in Jesus Christ." We need not get lost in discussing the metaphysic of it; but we must have so tasted the new life that nothing but the strongest word possible is just to it. Christ our New Creator! He was not simply a new departure in the history of

ethical civilization, by the introduction of an exalted morality. If that was what He came with, He brought much less than the conscience needs; and on countless points He has left us without guidance today.

Nor was He simply a great new departure in the history of religious ideas. He did much more than bring us a new idea of God. If that was all, again it was not what we need. For we have more and higher ideas of God than we know what to do with, more than we have power to realize. But He stands for a new departure in the history of Creation. His work in so far is cosmic. It is a new story added to the world. It is a new departure in the action which made the universe. It is an entirely new stage in the elevation of human nature, so imperfect in our first creation, to its divine height in holiness.

By His moral treatment of our sinful case, which is our actual historic case, we are taken into a share of His superhuman life. That is our salvation. It is life and power we need. It is to be made over again by the Maker's redeeming hand. We are redeemed from the ban of sin's magic circle by the only One who has the secret of the unseen powers; we are joined with the sin-destroying life of Christ. And we are redeemed, by the very nature of that redemption, into the fellowship of His eternal and blessed peace.

And that is our Reconciliation. The act that justified sanctifies and reconciles. And that totality of Christ in His Church is what God looks on and is satisfied. We are, as a believing race, in the Son in whom He is always well pleased.

Now what is it that has created so much difficulty for the old Protestant doctrine? I mean difficulty in the mind of Christian believers, and still more in their experience. For we need not trouble here about difficulty from the side of the worldlings or the ethical sentimentalists. But difficulty arose within the pale of the most devout and devoted evangelical experience. Perhaps it has arisen in your own minds. Well, the old Protestantism, as you know, was greatly exercised about the true relation between faith and works.

And it had to insist so strongly on the sole value of faith in order to cope with Rome that its later years fell into an excessive dread of good works, lest there should be ascribed to them saving effect. As a result faith was credited with a merely receptive power, or no more beyond that than a power of assent. Men lost hold of the great Lutheran fact that faith is the most mighty and active thing in the soul, that our faith is our all before God, that it is an energy of the whole person, that good works are done by this whole believing person, and that faith by its very nature, as trust in God's love, is bound to work out in love.

They misread the moral impulse in faith, its power to recast personality and refashion life. They did not, of course, overlook the necessity of such renovation; but they put it down to a subsequent action of the Spirit over and above faith - almost as if the Spirit and His sanctification were a second revelation, a new dispensation. Which indeed many of the mystics thought it was - like many rationalist mystics today, who think we have outgrown historic Christianity and the historic Christ through our modern light.

The old Protestant orthodoxy did not realize that the real source of the Spirit is the Cross. It therefore detached faith from life in a way that has produced the most unfortunate results, both in an antinomianism within the Church, and in a Socinian protest without, which was inevitable, and so far valuable, but was equally extreme. Faith was treated by the positive school then as a mystic power, or an intellectual, but not as a moral. It was not the renovating power in life, but only prepared the ground for the renovating power to come in.

It had not in itself the transforming power either individually or socially. Its connection with love was accidental and not necessary - as it must be, being faith in love. Now, if we translate this experimental

language into theological, it means that they did not connect up justification and sanctification. Forgiveness of sin was not identified closely enough with eternal life. Eternal life was detached from identity with that which was the true eternal in life, from faith's practical (i.e., experimental) godliness.

Forgiveness did not go, as it should, with renewal of heart and conduct in one act. It delivered from an old world without opening a new and planting us in its revolutionized principles. Faith had, indeed, the power to do works of love, but it was not driven to them so that it could do no other. And this flaw in faith corresponded to a like flaw in the reading of Christ's act which was the object of faith. They treated the work of Christ in a way far too objective. It was something done wholly over our heads.

There was not a solidary connection between Christ's work and the Church it created. Attention was concentrated upon one aspect of Christ's work - its action on God. That is quite an essential aspect (perhaps the chief), but it must not be isolated. No aspect of that work must be isolated, as I began by saying. It is the service an accomplished theology does for the Church to keep all aspects in one purview, in the proportion of a great and comprehensive faith. We have today gone to another extreme, and isolated another aspect - the moral effect of Christ on man.

So we need not give ourselves any airs of superiority to the old orthodoxy in that respect of one-sidedness. And we must also remember that the whole secret of truth in this matter is not what we are sometimes told - a change of emphasis. We have changed the emphasis, and yet we are short of the truth; and the state of the Church's piety shows it. We have moved the accent from the objective to the subjective work of Christ; and we fall victims more and more to a weak religious subjectivism which has the ethical interest but no the moral note.

We fall into a subjectivism which is reflected in one aspect of Pragmatism and overworks the principle contained in the words, "By their fruits shall ye know them" (know them, whether they are true to the Gospel, not the Gospel and whether it is true to God and reality). So that people say, "I will believe whatever I feel does me good. My soul will eat what I enjoy, and drink what makes me happy." They are their own test of truth, and "their own Holy Ghost." The secret, therefore, is not change of accent but balance of aspects.

And the true and competent theology is not only one which regards the Church's whole history and outlook (thinking in centuries, I called it), but it is one disciplined to think in proportion, to think together the various aspects of the Cross, and make them enrich and not exclude one another. The defect of the old view was, then, as I have said, that it could not couple up justification and sanctification. It could not show how the same act of Christ which delivered from the guilt of sin delivered also from its power.

And this was because in the justification too much stress was laid upon the suffering; and suffering in itself has no sanctifying power. You see how our practical experience, when it is well noted, provides our theological principles. We do find that suffering by itself debases, and even imbrutes, instead of purifying; that pain is an occasion rather than a cause of profit. That is a moral principle of spiritual experience. Consequently when excessive attention was given to the suffering of Christ, and the atoning value was supposed to reside there instead of in the holy obedience, the work of Christ lost in purifying and sanctifying effect, whatever it may have done in pacifying or converting.

The atoning thing being the holy obedience to the Holy, the same holiness which satisfied God sanctifies us. That is the idea the Reformers did not grasp through their preoccupation with Christ's sufferings. But it is the only idea which unites justification and sanctification and both with redemption. For the holiness

which satisfied God and sanctifies us also destroyed the evil power in the world and its hold on us. It was the moral conquest of the world's evil, amid the extreme conditions of sin and suffering, by a Victor who had a capital solidarity with the race, and not merely an individual connection with it as a member.

So that it has been said that we must explain and correct current ideas of substitutionary expiation by the idea of solidary reparation. The curse on man was the guilty power of sin and its train - hitherto invincible. There was but one way in which this could be mastered. A moral curse could be mastered only in a purely moral way, the world-curse by the world-conscience. It could be mastered but by One whose sinlessness was not only negatively proof against all that sin could do, but positively holy; and He was thus deadly to sin, satisfactory to God's loving judgment, and creative of a new humanity in the heart of the old.

This was a task beyond mere substitutionary penal suffering as that phrase is now so poorly understood. For that would have been just and effectual only if it had fallen on the arch-rebel, who, with the nobility of Milton's Satan in his first stage, assumed himself all the worst consequences of his revolt to spare the other souls whom he had misled.

The truth is that Anselm, in spite of the unspeakable service he did both to the faith and thought of his time and all time, yet put theology on a false track in this matter. He had too much to say of a superethical tribute paid to God's honor by the composition of a voluntary suffering. Our sin was compounded rather than really atoned. He did not grasp the sacrifice of Christ as made to God's holiness; as one therefore which could only be ethical in its nature, by way of holy obedience.

This obedience was the Holy Father's joy and satisfaction. He found Himself in it. And it was also the foiling and destruction of the evil power. And it was farther the creative source of holiness in a race not only impressed by the spectacle of its tragic hero victorious, but regenerate by the solidarity of a new life from its creative Head. The work of Christ was thus in the same act triumphant on evil, satisfying to the heart of God, and creative to the conscience of man by virtue of His solidarity with God on the one side, and on the other with the race.

He subdued Satan, rejoiced the Father, and set up in Humanity the kingdom - all in one supreme and consummate act of His one person. He destroyed the kingdom of evil, not by way of preparation for the kingdom of God, but by actually establishing God's kingdom in the heart of it. And He rejoiced, filled, and satisfied the heart of God, not by a statutory obedience, or by one private to Himself, which spectacle disposed God to bless and sanctify man; but by presenting in the compendious compass of His own person a Humanity presanctified by the irresistible power of His own creative and timeless work.

The holy demand of God is always couched in a false form when it is made to call for the expiation of an equivalent suffering instead of a confession of God's holiness, adequately holy, from the side of the sinner under judgment. Heaven and its happiness are wrongly conceived as immunity from judgment instead of joy in the consummation of judgment in righteousness and holiness for ever. It was not clear to the old view that the very nature of justification was sanctification, that the Justifier was so only as One who always perfectly sanctified Himself, and was organic, in the act, with the race in its new life.

It appeared to our fathers as if sanctification were only a facultative sequel of justification. Whatever we mean, therefore, by substitution, it is something more than merely vicarious. It is certainly not something done over our heads. It is representative. Yet not by the will of man choosing Christ, but by the will of Christ choosing man, and freely identifying Himself with man. It is a matter not so much of substitutionary expiation (which, as these words are commonly understood, leaves us too little committed), but of solidary

confession and praise from amid the judgment fires, where the Son of God walks with the creative sympathy of the holy among the sinful sons of men.

It is not as if Christ were our changeling, as if His lot and ours were transposed on the Cross. But He was our self-appointed plenipotentiary, and what He engaged for we must implement by an organic spiritual entail. So far His work was as objective as our creation, as independent of our leave; and it committed us without reference to our consent but to our need. When He died for all, all implicitly died. The great transaction was done for the race. But objective as it was, gift as it was to us from pure grace, it was so in its initiative rather than in its method.

Essentially it was a new creation of us, but practically the new creator was in us, and the word was flesh. In such a way that He and His are one by faith in a solidarity corresponding from beneath, *mutatis mutandis*, to the solidarity between Father and Son from above. He and His form an organic spiritual unity - one will in two parties or persons. Mere substitution is mere exchange of parts, in which one is excluded and immune. But the work of Christ is inclusive and committal, by our continuity of life with Him through the spirit in a Church. * The suffering of Christ is but the under and seamy side of that solidarity whose upper side is the beauty of our corporate holiness in Him.

The same law, the same act, which laid our sin on Him lays His holiness on us, and absorbs us into His satisfaction to God. In the same act God made Him to be sin for us and made us righteousness in Him. In the empirical sense we are no more made righteous than He was made sinful. But we are as closely incorporated in the holy world as He was in the sinful. And our holiness is not ours, in the same sense as our sin was not His - in the sense of initiative and individual responsibility for it.

It was as our self-appointed representative that Christ died. He died as the result, as the finale, of the act by which He identified Himself with us and emptied Himself from heaven. He is our Head by divine right and not by election of ours. Our representative, our surety He was - not our choice illustration, not our mandatory champion, not our moral deputy, not our friendly sponsor promising that we should one day pay our debt because of His optimistic faith in us. It was not in us that He had faith so much as in Himself as the power and grace of God.

He did not promise that we would pay (if the metaphor may be allowed); He paid for us, knowing that in Himself alone could we raise the vast advance. What was presented to God was not only Christ's perfection, nor was it His confidence in us, but also His antedated action on us, His confidence in Himself for us. That was what stood to our good. There was offered to God a racial obedience which was implicit in the creative power of His, and not merely parallel with His, as if He were our first fruits instead of our Sun.

The juristic aspect is a real element in Christ's death. It has a moral core; and we cannot discard it without discarding the moral order of the world as one revelation of that irrefragable holiness of God which must be expressed in judgment and confessed from its midst. The chief defect of the great revolution which began in Schleiermacher and ended in Ritschl has been that it allowed no place to that side of Christ's work. And it is a defect that much impoverishes the current type of religion, beclouds it, and robs it of the power of moral conviction by reducing the idea of sin and dismissing the note of guilt.

It makes grace not so much free as arbitrary, because it does not regard in its revelation what is due to the holiness of God. It banishes from our Christian faith the one note which more than any other we have today come to need restored - the note of judgment. When properly construed the juristic element is a great power to life faith from the mere ethicism to which Ritschl tends into the mystic region which is so

essential to make a moral power a religious, to provide a home for the soul as well as a lamp to our feet, and to secure for believers a hidden communion with Christ.

It also saves the grace of God from being a mere favoritism to believers, or a mere concession to misery. There is no doubt we are in reaction from a time when that side of things was overdone. The juristic aspect taken alone, and taken in relation to legal demand rather than personal holiness - such satisfaction, when isolated, does not do justice to the aspect in which Christ was triumphant over evil (redemption) nor to the aspect in which His work is regenerative for mankind (sanctification).

And it tended to promote the fatal notion that holiness could be satisfied with suffering and death, or with anything short of an answering holiness effected and guaranteed. The satisfaction in it was offered to a distributive justice rather than to a personal holiness, to a claim rather than a person, to a regulative law rather than to a constitutive life. All that and more is quite true. But I must ask you to deal sympathetically with those juristic views, to treat them with spiritual insight.

It was the vice of Socinianism, and it is the vice of the Rationalism which is its legatee, that it criticized orthodoxy by the fierce light of the natural conscience instead of by the inner nature and better knowledge of the relation on which orthodoxy founded all. It criticized theology by the natural reason and not by the supernatural Gospel. There is nothing more vulgar than slashing criticism in such a matter. You cannot slash here without cutting the face of some great and true saints to whom these views are dearer than life because bound up with their entrusted Gospel and their life eternal.

One of the most damnatory features of popular theological liberalism is the violent handling of what it calls orthodoxy, and its total lack of spiritual flexibility and interpretative sympathy - caused largely by the prior lack of theological knowledge and culture. That some orthodoxy is also shallow and insolent is no justification for those whose plea is that they know better. I pray you to listen to the old theology not as fools but as wise, as evolutionists and reformers, not as dynamitards.

Consider what was gained for us in it. True, it sometimes presented its gain in false forms, as when it spoke of the equivalence of Christ's suffering to what we all deserved. That was but the form, and the Socinians did good work in the correction of such things. But this at least had been gained - the conviction that it was not the touchy honor of a feudal monarch that was to be dealt with at the had of the world, but the love of a just God. The conviction behind all was the grandest moral conviction possible - that all things are by Christ in the hands of infinite righteousness and holy love.

This vast moral step had been taken. Men had come to realize that the result of Christ's work was eternal right; and especially that it was right, not in reference to the claims of an evil will, but in regard to those of a will perfectly good. The days were certainly outgrown by this juristic theology when there could be any such talk as filled the early Church about dealing with the rights Satan had won over man. Evil has no rights in the soul. From that, indeed, it was a great advance even to Anselm's apotheosis of God's honor.

And it was a further advance still beyond feudal dignity when the great and noble categories of juris-prudence were invoked to replace the notion of courtly or military honor which made God and man duelists rather than ought else. It was a vast step in the moralizing of theology when its grand concern came to be the establishment of men before a righteous and social judge. Do not speak contemptuously of that step. It is one of our own stages. It gave us rest and uplifting on our journey to where we now stand.

We have only had to carry further that moralizing of the nature of justice. The whole idea was ethical and social compared with what went before it - at least as much so as ours now marks a farther advance. It was ethical as regards claims by an evil power which can have no moral rights. And it was social in that it brought Christian belief into line with the ruling principles of society as it then was. It is a view, moreover, which has shown itself capable of inspiring some of the deepest, sweetest, and most beneficent piety the world has ever seen.

Moreover, it had in it active conditions of moral growth which broke through the packthreads of its own time. We today have only had to carry forward that process of moralizing the idea of our relation to God which the jurists began. Their theology had a moral passion which shed the features in it that were ethically defective, and assimilated the moral idea of the Gospel as we are now taught to read it in a Bible rediscovered and reconstrued by the Spirit's action both in the faith and the criticism of the day.

Among these three aspects of Christ's work some minds will be drawn by preference to one, some to another, just as different ages have been. Some souls, according to their experience, will gravitate to the great Deliverance, some to the great Atonement, and some to the great Regeneration. Some ministries will be marked by the influence of one, some of another. That is all within the free affinities of the spiritual life, and the preferential sympathies of the moral idiosyncrasy.

And the Church is enriched by the complementary action of such diversities of ministry. But what ought not to be encouraged is any tendency on the part of those who prefer the one line to deny the equal right of the others. And what ought not to be tolerated is the habit of denunciation, by those who see the one side, of the sides they find nothing in; and especially the habit of assuming that the sides they are blind to represent a lower Christian level. Where this is possible there has really been little done for the conscience by the view that is adopted.

And it is both absurd and overweening to ask us to believe that those sections of the Church, and those lights of piety, who held to views at present in the background were all theological bigots and moral inepts; that real moral aptitude and theological faculty did not arise till now; that a like devotion obscures such questions; that babes and suckling perfect theological praise; that wisdom is justified by children; and that it is now the monopoly of those who detach theology from religion, and dismiss it to a historical museum.

If Christ by the Savior of the world in any sense, the thing He did must be at least as great as the world. And if as great, then no less manifold, and no less the object for first-rate intelligence than the lower objects of experience. Faith in such a Savior cannot continue to live for either heart or conscience if it is detached from mind. Nor can mind submit to be warned off the supreme object of the soul's concern if that object is loved and sought with all our heart and soul and strength.

The very type of prayer in the non-theological forms which claim to be Christian shows to what we can sink when faith is stripped of mind and strength. It is only a poor Christ that can be housed in a poor creed, and a feeble prophet that is canonized when a sentimentalized ethic is offered as religion.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/pt-forsyth/the-threefold-cord/>

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