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SUBSTITUTION

#207

Contents

The Heart of the Gospel	1
Christ's Federal Work	5
The Great Exchange Explained	7
Christ's Penal Work	11
An Entire Pardon	16
Satisfaction and Substitution Outlined	20
God's Wisdom in Christ's Substitution	23

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—2 Corinthians 5:21

THE heart of the Gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. They who preach this truth preach the Gospel in whatever else they may be mistaken; but they who preach not the atonement, whatever else they declare, have missed the soul and substance of the divine message. In these days, I feel bound to go over and over again the elementary truths of the Gospel. In peaceful times, we may feel free to make excursions into interesting districts of truth that lie far afield; but now we must stay at home and guard the hearths and homes of the church by defending the *first principles of the faith*. In this age, there have risen up in the church itself men who speak perverse things. There be many that trouble us with their philosophies and novel interpretations, whereby they deny the doctrines they profess to teach and undermine the faith they are pledged to maintain. It is well that some of us, who know what we believe and have no secret meanings for our words, should just put our foot down and maintain our standing, holding forth the Word of life and plainly declaring the foundation truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...I have no desire to be famous for anything but preaching the old

Gospel. There are plenty who can fiddle to you the new music. It is for me to have no music at any time but that which is heard in heaven: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood...to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!” (Rev 1:5-6)...

I have found, my brethren, by long experience that nothing touches the heart like the cross of Christ. When the heart is touched and wounded by the two-edged sword of the Law, nothing heals its wounds like the balm that flows from the pierced heart of Jesus. The cross is life to the spiritually dead...When we see men quickened, converted, and sanctified by the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice, we may justly conclude that it is the *true* doctrine of atonement. I have not known men made to live unto God and holiness except by the doctrine of the death of Christ on man’s behalf. Hearts of stone that never beat with life before have been turned to flesh through the Holy Spirit causing them to know this truth...The story of the great Lover of the souls of men Who gave Himself for their salvation is still, in the hand of the Holy Ghost, the greatest of all forces in the realm of mind...

FIRST, THEN, WITH AS MUCH BREVITY AS POSSIBLE, I WILL SPEAK UPON THE GREAT DOCTRINE. The great doctrine, the greatest of all, is this: God, seeing men to be lost by reason of their sin, hath taken that sin of theirs and laid it upon His only begotten Son, making Him to be sin for us, even Him Who knew no sin. In consequence of this transference of sin, he that believeth in Christ Jesus is made just and righteous, yea, is made to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Christ was made *sin* that sinners might be made *righteousness*. That is the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ on the behalf of guilty men.

Now consider, first, *who was made sin for us?* The description of our great Surety¹ here given is upon one point only, and it may more than suffice us for our present meditation. Our substitute was spotless, innocent, and pure. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Christ Jesus, the Son of God, became incarnate—made flesh—and dwelt here among men; but though He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, He knew no sin. Though upon Him sin was laid, yet not so as to make Him *guilty*. He was not, He could not be a sinner: He had no personal knowledge of sin. Throughout the whole of His life, He never committed an offense against the great Law of truth and right. The Law was in His heart. It was His nature to be holy. He could say to all the world, “Which of you convinceth me² of sin?” (Joh 8:46). Even His vacillating³ judge enquired, “Why, what evil hath he done?” (Mat 27:23). When all Jerusalem was challenged and bribed to bear witness against Him, no witnesses could be found. It was necessary to misquote and wrest His words before a charge could be trumped up against Him by His bitterest enemies. His life brought Him in contact with both the Tables of the Law, but no single command had He transgressed. As the Jews examined the Paschal lamb⁴ before they slew it, so did scribes and Pharisees, and doctors of the Law, and rulers and princes examine the Lord Jesus without finding offense in Him. He was the Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot.

As there was no sin of commission, so was there about our Lord no fault of omission.⁵ Probably, dear brethren, we that are believers have been enabled by divine grace to escape most sins of commission; but I for one have to mourn daily over sins of omission. If we have spiritual graces, yet they do not reach the point required of us. If we do that which is right in itself, yet we usually mar our work...either in the motive, in the manner of doing it, or by the self-satisfaction with which we view it when it is done. We come short of the glory of God in some respect or other. We forget to do what we ought to do, or, doing it, we are guilty of lukewarmness, self-reliance, unbelief, or some other grievous error. It was not so with our divine Redeemer. You cannot say that there was any feature deficient in His perfect beauty. He was complete in heart, in purpose, in thought, in word, in deed, in spirit...No pearl has dropped from the silver string of His character. No one virtue has overshadowed and dwarfed the rest: all perfections combine in perfect harmony to make in Him *one surpassing perfection*.

Neither did our Lord know a sin of thought. His mind never produced an evil wish or desire. There never was in the heart of our blessed Lord a wish for any evil pleasure, nor a desire to escape any suffering or shame that was involved in His service. When He said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” He never

¹ **Surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another.

² **convinceth me** – proves me guilty.

³ **vacillating** – changing between one opinion and another; undecided.

⁴ **Paschal lamb** – lamb sacrificed at the Jewish celebration of Passover.

⁵ **sin of commission...omission** – a sin of *commission*: when one does what is forbidden or what is good, but for the wrong reason; sin of *omission*: when one does not perform what is commanded.

desired to escape the bitter potion at the expense of His perfect lifework. The “if it be possible” meant “if it be consistent with full obedience to the Father, and the accomplishment of the divine purpose.” We see the weakness of His nature shrinking and the holiness of His nature resolving and conquering as He adds, “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Mat 26:39). He took upon Him the likeness of sinful flesh, but though that flesh often caused Him weariness of body, it never produced in Him the weakness of sin. He took our infirmities, but He never exhibited an infirmity that had the least of blameworthiness attached to it. Never fell there an evil glance from those blessed eyes. Never did His lips let drop a hasty word. Never did those feet go on an ill errand or those hands move towards a sinful deed. Because His heart was filled with holiness and love *within* as well as *without*, our Lord was unblemished. His desires were as perfect as His actions. Searched by the eyes of Omniscience, no shadow of fault could be found in Him.

Yea, more, there were no tendencies about our Substitute towards evil in *any* form. In us, there are always those tendencies, for the taint of original sin⁶ is upon us. We have to govern ourselves and hold ourselves under stern restraint, or we should rush headlong to destruction. Our carnal nature lusteth to evil and needs to be held in as with bit and bridle. Happy is that man who can master himself. But with regard to our Lord, it was His nature to be pure, right, and loving. All His sweet wills were towards goodness. His unconstrained life was holiness itself: He was “the holy child Jesus.” The prince of this world found in Him no fuel for the flame that he desired to kindle. Not only did no sin flow from Him, but there was no sin in Him, or inclination, or tendency in that direction. Watch Him in secret, and you find Him in prayer. Look into His soul, and you find Him eager to do and suffer the Father’s will. Oh, the blessed character of Christ! If I had the tongues of men and of angels, I could not worthily set forth His absolute perfection! Justly may the Father be well pleased with Him! Well may heaven adore Him!

Beloved, it was *absolutely necessary* that anyone who should be able to suffer in our stead should himself be spotless. A sinner obnoxious to⁷ punishment because of his own offenses—what can he do but bear the wrath that is due to his own sin? Our Lord Jesus Christ as man was made under the Law; but He owed *nothing* to that Law, for He perfectly fulfilled it in all respects. He was capable of standing in the room, place, and stead of others because He was under no obligations of His own. He was only under obligations towards God because He had voluntarily undertaken to be the surety and sacrifice for those whom the Father gave Him. He was clear Himself, or else He could not have entered into bonds for guilty men.

Oh, how I admire Him! That being such as He was—spotless and thrice holy, so that even the heavens were not pure in His sight, and He charged His angels with folly—yet He condescended to be made sin for us! How could He endure to be numbered with the transgressor and bear the sin of many? It may be no misery for a sinful man to live with sinful men, but it would be a heavy sorrow for the pure-minded to dwell with a company of abandoned and licentious wretches. What an overwhelming sorrow it must have been to the pure and perfect Christ to tabernacle among the hypocritical, the selfish, and the profane! How much worse that He Himself should have to take upon Himself the sins of those guilty men! His sensitive and delicate nature must have shrunk from even the shadow of sin, and yet read the words and be astonished: “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Our perfect Lord and Master bare our sins in His own body on the tree. He, before Whom the sun itself is dim and the pure azure of heaven is defilement, was made sin. I need not put this in fine words: *the fact is itself too grand to need any magnifying by human language.* To gild refined gold or paint the lily [would be] absurd, but much more absurd would it be to try to overlay with flowers of speech the matchless beauties of the cross.

THIS LEADS ME ON TO THE SECOND POINT...WHAT WAS DONE WITH HIM WHO KNEW NO SIN? He was “made sin.” It is a wonderful expression: the more you weigh it, the more you will marvel at its singular strength. Only the Holy Ghost might originate such language. It was wise for the divine Teacher to use very strong expressions, for else the thought might not have entered human minds. Even now, despite the emphasis, clearness, and distinctness of the language used here and elsewhere in Scripture, there are found men daring enough to deny that substitution is taught in Scripture. With such subtle wits, it is useless to argue. It is clear that language has no meaning for them. To read the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, to accept it as relating to the Messiah, and then to deny His substitutionary sacrifice is simply *wickedness*. It would be vain to reason with such beings: they are so blind that if

⁶ **original sin** – Q. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell? A: The sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want [*lack*] of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin, together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. (Spurgeon’s Catechism, Q. 17)

⁷ **obnoxious to** – subject to; deserving of.

they were transported to the sun they could not see. In the church and out of the church there is a deadly animosity to this truth. Modern thought labors to get away from what is obviously the meaning of the Holy Spirit *that sin was lifted from the guilty and laid upon the innocent*. It is written, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). This is as plain language as can be used; but if any plainer was required, here it is, “He hath made him to be sin for us.”

The Lord God laid upon Jesus, Who voluntarily undertook it, *all the weight of human sin*. Instead of its resting on the sinner, who *did* commit it, it was made to rest upon Christ, Who *did not* commit it. [And] the righteousness that Jesus wrought out was placed to the account of the guilty, who had not worked it out, so that the guilty are treated as righteous. Those who by nature are guilty are regarded as righteous, while He who by nature knew no sin whatever was treated as guilty. I think I must have read in scores of books that such a transference is *impossible*. But the statement has had no effect upon my mind: I do not care whether it is impossible or not with learned unbelievers. It is evidently possible with God, for He has done it. But they say it is contrary to reason. I do not care for that either: it may be contrary to the reason of those unbelievers, but it is not contrary to mine...God saith it and I believe it. And believing it, I find life and comfort in it. Shall I not preach it? *Assuredly*, I will...Christ was not guilty and could not be made guilty. But He was treated *as if He were guilty* because He willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, He was not only treated as a sinner, but He was treated as if He had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance! The sinless One was made to be sin.

Sin pressed our great Substitute very sorely. He felt the weight of it in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He sweat “as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luk 22:44). The full pressure of it came upon Him when He was nailed to the accursed tree. There in the hours of darkness, He bore infinitely more than we can tell. We know that He bore condemnation from the mouth of man, so that it is written, “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa 53:12)...It was a cruel scorn that exhausted itself upon His blessed Person. This, I say, we know. We know that He bore pains innumerable of body and of mind: He thirsted, He cried out in the agony of desertion, He bled, He died. We know that He poured out His soul unto death and yielded up the ghost. But there was at the back, and beyond all this, an immeasurable abyss of suffering. The Greek Liturgy⁸ fitly speaks of “Thine unknown sufferings.” Probably to us they are *unknowable* sufferings. He was God as well as man. The Godhead lent an omnipotent power to the manhood, so that there was compressed within His soul and endured by it an amount of anguish of which we can form no conception...“He made him to be sin.” Look into the words. Perceive their meaning, if you can. The angels desire to look into it. Gaze into this terrible crystal. Let your eyes search deep into this opal, within whose jeweled depth there are flames of fire. The Lord made the perfectly innocent One to be sin for us. That means more of humiliation, darkness, agony, and death than you can conceive! It brought a kind of distraction and well nigh a destruction to the tender and gentle spirit of our Lord. I do not say that our Substitute endured hell: that were unwarrantable. I will not say that He endured either the exact punishment for sin or an equivalent for it. But I *do* say that what He endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of His Law clearer and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of the sinners for whom He died. The cross is under many aspects a more full revelation of the wrath of God against human sin than even Tophet⁹ and the smoke of torment that goeth up forever and ever (Rev 14:11). Who would know God’s hate of sin must see the Only Begotten bleeding in body and bleeding in soul even unto death. He must, in fact, spell out each word of my text and read its innermost meaning: “He hath made him to be sin for us.” Oh depth of terror, and yet height of love!...How acceptable with God must those be who are made by God Himself to be “the righteousness of God in him!” I cannot conceive of anything more complete.

As Christ was made sin and yet never sinned, so are we made right-eousness, though we cannot claim to have been righteous in and of ourselves. Sinners though we be, and forced to confess it with grief, yet the Lord doth cover us so completely with the righteousness of Christ that only His righteousness is seen; and we are made the right-eousness of God in Him. This is true of all the saints, even of as many as believe on His name. Oh, the splendor of this doctrine! Canst thou see it, my friend? Sinner though thou be and in thyself defiled, deformed, and debased; yet if thou wilt accept the great Substitute that God provides for thee in the Person of His dear Son, thy sins are gone from thee, and righteousness has come to thee. Thy sins were laid on Jesus, the scapegoat! They are thine no longer; He has put them away. I may say that His righteousness is imputed unto thee; but I go further

⁸ **Greek Liturgy** – rituals used in the public worship of the Greek Orthodox Church.

⁹ **Tophet** – the Valley of Hinnom, where Jews sacrificed their children to Molech.

and say with the text, “Thou art made the righteousness of God in him.” No doctrine can be more sweet than this to those who feel the weight of sin and the burden of its curse.

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, July 18, 1886, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, reprinted by Pilgrim Publications. Available as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): English Baptist; history’s most widely read preacher (apart from those in the Bible); born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

A *surety* is one that undertakes and is bound to do a thing for another, as to pay a debt for him or to bring him safe to such or such a place or the like; so when he hath discharged what he undertook and was bound for, then the party for whom he undertook is discharged also.—
Thomas Goodwin

CHRIST’S FEDERAL WORK

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

BY the term *federal*,¹⁰ we mean that there was an official oneness existing between the Mediator¹¹ and those for whom He mediated or, in simpler language, that there is a legal union between Christ and His people. “When, in the Old Testament, the elect are spoken of as the party with whom God makes a covenant, they are viewed as in Christ and one with Him. The covenant is not made with them as alone and apart from Christ. This is taught in Galatians 3:16: ‘To Abraham and his seed were the promises made,’ but this seed ‘is Christ.’ The elect are here (as also in 1Co 12:12) called ‘Christ,’ because of the union between Christ and the elect. And in like manner, when Christ, as in Isaiah 42:1–6, is spoken of as the party with Whom the Father covenants, the elect are to be viewed as in Him. As united and one with Him, *His* atoning suffering is looked upon as *their* atoning suffering: ‘I am crucified with Christ’ (Gal 2:20).”¹²

“Christ is not only the Substitute but the Surety of His people. The Gospel is founded on the fact Adam and Christ are covenant heads and representatives of their respective families. Hence, they are termed ‘the first man’ and ‘the second man’ (1Co 15:47), as if there had been none other but themselves, for the children of each were entirely dependent on their head. In Adam all die; in Christ all are made alive (1Co 15:22). The first ‘all’ includes every individual of mankind, the last ‘all’ is explained by the apostle to mean ‘they that are Christ’s’ (1Co 15:23).”¹³

It was as the Head of His elect that God covenanted with Christ, so that, in a very real sense, that covenant was made with them. This it is that explains all those passages that speak of the saints’ oneness with Christ, as that, they were “crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20), “died with Him” (Rom 6:8), were “buried with Him” as Scriptural baptism symbolizes (Rom 6:4), were “quickened” with Him (Col 2:12), “raised with Him” (Eph 2:6), and made to “sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). So they were legally one with Him and He with them in all that He did in rendering a full satisfaction to God. On this vitally important point, we cannot do better than give a synopsis of the last section from chapter two of Hugh Martin’s invaluable work:

“How are we to formulate and establish the relation subsisting¹⁴ between Christ and His, as Redeemer and redeemed, unless we fall back upon the doctrine of the Covenant?¹⁵ *Some* relation, it is evident, must be

¹⁰ **federal** – legal representative.

¹¹ **Mediator** – a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1)

¹² William Greenough Thayer Shedd (1820-1894), *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 2 (New York, NY; Scribner’s Sons, 1891), 361.

¹³ James Haldane (1768-1851), *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (William Whyte & Co., 1845).

¹⁴ **subsisting** – existing.

¹⁵ Moreover man having brought himself under the curse of the Law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a Covenant of Grace wherein He freely offereth unto sinners, life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give

acknowledged as subsisting between Christ and those on whose behalf He dies, else we do not even come within sight of the idea of a vicarious¹⁶ sacrifice. The possibility of real atonement absolutely postulates and demands a conjuncture between Him Who atones and those for whom His atonement is available. This is beyond the need of proof. And as there is an absolute and obvious necessity for *some* conjuncture or relation, so in searching for *the* conjunction or relation that actually subsists, our search cannot terminate satisfactorily until we reach and recognize the covenant oneness. The same reason that demands a relation remains unsatisfied until it meets with *this* relation.”¹⁷

It does not meet the necessities of the case to refer to the union between Christ and His people that is effected in their regeneration by the agency of the Holy Spirit and the instrumentality of the faith that is His gift. True, this is indispensable before any can enjoy any of the blessings of His purchase. But there must have been a relation between Christ and His people *before* He ransomed them. Nor are the necessities of the case met by a reference to the Incarnation. True, the Redeemer must take upon Him flesh and blood before He could redeem, yet there must be a bond of union more intimate than that which Christ holds alike to the saved and the unsaved. He took hold of “the seed of Abraham” (Heb 2:16), not the “seed of Adam”! Nor is it sufficient to say that the relation is that of suretyship and substitution; for the question still calls for answer, “What rendered it fit and righteous that the Son of God should suffer for others, the Holy One be made sin?” It is to this point the inquiry must be narrowed.

Christ was the Surety of His people because He was their Substitute. He acted on their behalf because He stood in their room. The relation of a substitute *justifies* the suretyship; but what shall justify the substitution? There is the hinge upon which everything turns. We heartily concur with Dr. Martin when he says, “We can obtain no satisfaction on this point, no sufficient answer to this question, and therefore no satisfactory conclusion to our whole line of investigation, until the doctrine of the everlasting covenant oneness comes into view. That is the grand underlying relation. That is the grand primary conjunction between the Redeemer and the redeemed, which alone bears up and accounts for all else in respect of relation which can be predicated as true concerning them. ‘For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren’ (Heb 2:11)...He is substituted *for* us, because He is one *with* us—identified with us and we with Him.”¹⁸

Promoted by infinite love, Christ as the God-man freely accepted the terms of the Everlasting Covenant that had been proposed to Him and voluntarily assumed all the legal responsibilities of His people. As their Head, He came down to this earth, lived, wrought, and died as their vicarious Representative. He obeyed and suffered as their Substitute. By His obedience and sufferings, He discharged all their obligations. His sufferings remitted the penalty of the Law, and His obedience merited infinite blessings for them. Romans 5:12–19 explicitly affirms that the elect of God are legally “made righteous” on precisely the same principle by which they were first “made sinners.” “Our union with Christ is of the same order and involves the same class of effects as our union with Adam. We call it a union both *federal* and *vital*. Others may call it what they please, but it will nevertheless remain certain that it is of such a nature as to involve an identity of legal relations and reciprocal¹⁹ obligations and rights.”²⁰ “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19)—“made the right-eousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21).

More than a thousand years ago, Augustine²¹ remarked, “Such is the ineffable²² closeness of this transcendental²³ union, that we hear the voice of the members suffering when they suffered in their Head and cried through the Head on the cross, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Mat 27:46). And, in like manner, we hear the voice of the Head suffering when He suffered in His members and cried to the persecutor on the way to Damascus, ‘Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?’ (Act 9:4).”

unto all those that are ordained unto eternal Life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 7.3)

¹⁶ **vicarious** – suffered by one person as a substitute for another.

¹⁷ Hugh Martin (1822-1885), *The Atonement: In Its Relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of Our Lord* (London: James Nisbet, 1870), 30.

¹⁸ Martin, *Atonement*, 35.

¹⁹ **reciprocal** – given by each of two people to the other.

²⁰ Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), *The Atonement* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867), 205.

²¹ **Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430)** – early church theologian known by some as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

²² **ineffable** – incapable of being expressed; indescribable.

²³ **transcendental** – supernatural.

The federal relation of Christ to His people was a real one, upon which the infallible God deemed it just to punish *Christ* for the sins of His people and to credit *them* with His righteousness, and thus completely satisfy all the demands of His Law upon them. As the result of that union, Christ was in all things “made like unto his brethren” (Heb 2:17), being “numbered (reckoned one) with transgressors” (Isa 53:12). They in turn are “members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). In consequence of this federal union, Christ is also made “a quickening²⁴ Spirit” (1Co 15:45), so that, in due time, each of His people becomes a living and vital member of that spiritual body of which He is the Head (Eph 1:19–23).

The relation between Christ and those who benefit from His Atonement was therefore no vague, indefinite, haphazard one, but consisted of an actual covenant oneness, legal identity, and vital union. Suretyship presupposes it. Strict substitution demands it. Real imputation proceeds upon it. The penalty Christ endured could not otherwise have been inflicted. They for whom Satisfaction was made do, by inevitable necessity, share its benefits and receive what was purchased for them. This alone meets the objection of the injustice of the Innocent suffering for the guilty, as it alone explains the transfer of Christ’s sufferings and merits to the redeemed.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, reprinted by Chapel Library.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher; born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934; born in Nottingham, England.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE EXPLAINED

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”—2 Corinthians 5:21

I BRING you now...the great philosophy of salvation, the hidden mystery, the great secret, the wonderful discovery that is brought to light by the Gospel: how God is just and yet the justifier of the ungodly (Rom 3:26). Let us read the text again and then at once proceed to discuss it...“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Note the doctrine...There are three persons mentioned here. “He (that is, *God*) hath made Him (that is, *Christ*), Who knew no sin, to be sin for us (*sinner*s) that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Before we can understand the plan of salvation, it is necessary for us to know something about the three persons. Unless we understand them in some measure, salvation is to us impossible.

1. HERE IS FIRST, GOD. Let every man know what God is. God is a very different Being from what some of you suppose. The God of heaven and of earth—the Jehovah of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob, Creator and Preserver, the God of Holy Scripture, and the God of all grace—is not the God that some men make unto themselves and worship. There be men in this so-called Christian land, who worship a god who is no more God than Venus²⁵ or Bacchus!²⁶ A god made after their own hearts—a god not fashioned out of stone or wood, but fashioned from their own thoughts, out of baser stuff than ever heathen attempted to make a god of. The God of Scripture has three great attributes, and they are all three implied in the text.

The God of Scripture is a sovereign God. That is, He is a God Who has absolute authority and absolute power to do exactly as He pleas-eth. Over the head of God, there is no law; upon His arm, there is no necessity. He knoweth no rule but His own free and mighty will. Though He cannot be unjust and cannot do anything but good, yet is His

²⁴ **quicken**ing – life-giving.

²⁵ **Venus** – Roman mythology: goddess of love and physical beauty.

²⁶ **Bacchus** or **Dionysus** – Greek and Roman mythology: the god of wine and ecstasy.

nature absolutely free; for goodness is the freedom of God's nature. God is not to be controlled by the will of man, the desires of man, or by fate in which the superstitious believe. He is God, doing as He willeth in the armies of heaven and in this lower world. He is a God, too, Who giveth no account of His matters. He makes His creatures just what He chooses to make them and does with them just as He wills. If any of them resent His acts, He saith unto them, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom 9:20-21). God is good; but God is *sovereign*, absolute, knowing nothing that can control Him. The monarchy of this world is no constitutional and limited monarchy. It is not tyrannical, but it is absolutely in the hands of an all-wise God. But mark, it is in no hands but His... This is the God of the Bible. This is the God Whom we adore. No weak, pusillanimous²⁷ God Who is controlled by the will of men, Who cannot steer the bark²⁸ of providence; but a God unalterable, infinite, unerring. This is the God we worship: A God as infinitely above His creatures as the highest thought can fly, and higher still than that.

But, again, the God Who is here mentioned is a God of infinite justice. That He is a sovereign God, I prove from the words that He hath made Christ to be sin. He could not have done it if He had not been sovereign. That He is a just God, I infer from my text, seeing that the way of salvation is a great plan of satisfying justice. And we now declare that the God of Holy Scripture is a God of inflexible justice. He is not the god whom some of you adore. You adore a god who winks at great sins. You believe in a god who calls your crimes peccadilloes²⁹ and little faults. Some of you worship a god who does not punish sin, but who is so weakly merciful and so mercilessly weak that he passes by transgression and iniquity and never enacts a punishment. You believe in a god who, if man sins, does not demand punishment for his offense. You think that a few good works of your own will pacify him, that he is so weak a ruler that a few good words uttered before him in prayer will win sufficient merit to reverse the sentence, if, indeed, you think he ever passes a sentence at all. Your god is *no* God... The God of the Bible is as severe as if He were unmerciful, and as just as if He were not gracious; yet He is as gracious and as merciful as if He were not just—yea, more so. And one more thought here concerning God, or else we cannot establish our discourse upon a sure basis.

The God Who is here mentioned is a God of grace. Think not that I am now contradicting myself! The God Who is inflexibly severe and never pardons sin without punishment is yet a God of illimitable³⁰ love. Although as a Ruler He will chastise, yet, as the Father-God, He loveth to bestow His blessing. "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Eze 33:11). God is love in its highest degree. He is love rendered more than love. Love is not God, but God *is* love. He is full of grace; He is the plenitude³¹ of mercy; He delighteth in mercy. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are His thoughts of love above our thoughts of despair; and His ways of grace above our ways of fear. This God, in whom these three great attributes harmonize—illimitable sovereignty, inflexible justice, and unfathomable grace—these three make up the main attributes of the one God of heaven and earth Whom Christians worship. It is *this* God before Whom we must appear. It is He Who has made Christ to be sin for us, though He knew no sin. Thus, we have brought the first person before you.

2. THE SECOND PERSON OF OUR TEXT IS THE SON OF GOD—Christ, Who knew no sin. He is the Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds: begotten, not made; being of the same substance with the Father, co-equal, co-eternal, and co-existent. Is the Father Almighty? So is the Son Almighty. Is the Father infinite? So is the Son infinite. He is very God of very God: having a dignity not inferior to the Father, but being equal to Him in every respect—God over all, blessed for evermore (Rom 9:5)! Jesus Christ also is the son of Mary, a man like unto ourselves; a man subject to all the infirmities of human nature, except the infirmities of sin; a man of suffering and of woe, of pain and trouble, of anxiety and fear, of trouble and of doubt, of temptation and of trial, of weakness and death. He is a man just as we are—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

Now, the Person we wish to introduce to you is this complex being: God and man. Not God *humanized*, not man *Deified*; but God, purely, essentially God; man, purely man; man, not more than man; God, not less than God—the

²⁷ **pusillanimous** – lacking courage.

²⁸ **bark** – small ship.

²⁹ **peccadilloes** – small sins or faults.

³⁰ **illimitable** – impossible to limit.

³¹ **plenitude** – full supply.

two standing in a sacred union together: the God-Man...Our text says that He knew no sin. It does not say that He *did* not sin. That we know. But it says more than that: He did not *know* sin. He knew not what sin was. He saw it in others, but He did not know it by experience. He was a perfect stranger to it. It is not barely said that He did not take sin into His heart, but *He did not know it*. It was no acquaintance of His. He was the acquaintance of grief, but He was not the acquaintance of sin. He knew no sin of any kind—no sin of thought; no sin of birth—no original, no actual transgression; no sin of lip or of hand did ever Christ commit. He was pure, perfect, spotless, like His own divinity: without spot, blemish, or any such thing. This gracious Person is He Who is spoken of in the text...Now I have to introduce the third person: We will not go far for him.

3. THE THIRD PERSON IS THE SINNER. And where is he? Will you turn your eyes within you and look for him, each one of you? He is not very far from you. He has been a drunkard: he has committed drunkenness, reveling,³² and such like. We know that the man who committeth these things hath no inheritance in the kingdom of God. There is another: he has taken God's name in vain...Ah! *There* is the sinner. Where is he? I hear that man with tearful eye and with sobbing voice exclaim, "Sir, he is here!" Methinks I see some woman here in the midst of us. Some of us have accused her perhaps, and she standeth alone trembling and saith not a word for herself. Oh! That the Master might say, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (Joh 8:11). I believe, I must believe, that somewhere amongst these many thousands, I hear some palpitating heart. And that heart, as it beats so hurriedly crieth, "Sin, sin, sin, wrath, wrath, wrath—how can I get deliverance?" Ah! *Thou* art the man—a born rebel. Born into the world a sinner, thou hast added to thy native guilt thine own transgressions. Thou hast broken the commandments of God, thou hast despised God's love, thou hast trampled on His grace, thou hast gone on hitherto until now—the arrow of the Lord is drinking up thy spirit. God hath made thee tremble. He hath made thee to confess thy guilt and thy transgression. Hear me, then, if your convictions are the work of God's Spirit: you are the person intended in the text, when it says, "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we"—that is, *you*—"might be made the righteousness of God in him."

I have introduced the persons, and now I must introduce you to a scene of a great exchange that is made according to the text. The third person whom we introduce is the prisoner at the bar. God has called him as a sinner before [Himself]. He is about to be tried for life or death. God is gracious, and He desires to save him. God is just, and He must punish him. The sinner is to be tried. If there be a verdict of guilty brought in against him, how will the two conflicting attributes work in God's mind? He is loving; He wants to save him. He is just; he must destroy him! How shall this mystery be solved and the riddle be solved? Prisoner at the bar, canst thou plead "Not Guilty?" He stands speechless; or, if he speaks, he cries, "I *am* Guilty!"

Then, you see, if he has pleaded guilty himself, there is no hope of there being any flaw in the evidence. Even if he had pleaded "not guilty," yet the evidence is most clear. God the Judge has seen his sin and recorded all his iniquities, so that there would be no hope of his escaping. The prisoner is sure to be found guilty. How can he escape? Is there a flaw in the indictment? No! It is drawn up by infinite wisdom and dictated by eternal justice. There is no hope there...How then shall the prisoner at the bar escape? Is there *any* possibility? Oh! How did heaven wonder! How did the stars stand still with astonishment! How did the angels stay their songs a moment, when for the first time, God showed how He might be just and yet be gracious! Oh! I think I see heaven *astonished* and silence in the courts of God for the space of an hour, when the Almighty said, "Sinner, I must and will punish thee on account of sin! But I love thee; the bowels of my love yearn over thee...My justice says, 'Smite'; but my love stays my hand, and says, 'Spare, spare the sinner!' Oh! Sinner, my heart hath devised it! My Son, the pure and perfect shall stand in thy stead and be accounted guilty; and thou, the guilty, shall stand in my Son's stead and be accounted righteous!"

It would make us leap upon our feet in astonishment if we did but understand this thoroughly—the wonderful mystery of the transposition³³ of Christ and the sinner! Let me put it so plainly that everyone can understand: Christ was spotless; sinners were vile. Says Christ, "My Father, treat me as if *I* were a sinner. Treat the sinner as if he were *Me*. Smite as sternly as Thou pleasest, for I will bear it. Thus, the [heart] of Thy love may overflow with

³² **reveling** – drinking parties involving unrestrained indulgence in alcoholic beverages and accompanying immoral behavior.

³³ **transposition** – reversal of order.

grace, and yet Thy justice be unsullied,³⁴ for the sinner is no sinner now.” He stands in Christ’s stead; and with the Savior’s garments on, he is accepted.

Do you say that such an exchange as this is unjust? Will you say that God should not have made His Son a substitute for us and have let us go? Let me remind you, it was purely *voluntary* on the part of Christ. Christ was willing to stand in our stead. He had to drink the cup of our punishment, but He was quite willing to do it. Let me tell you yet one more unanswerable thing: the substitution of Christ was not an unlawful thing because the *sovereign God* made Him a substitute...the substitution was made by the highest authority. The text says, God “hath made him to be sin for us,” and inasmuch as Christ did stand in my room, place, and stead, He did not make the exchange unlawfully. It was with the full determinate counsel of Almighty God, as well as with His own consent that Christ stood in the sinner’s place, as the sinner doth now in Christ’s place...the sinner is treated as if he were Christ, and Christ is treated as if He were the sinner. That is what is meant by the text, “[God] hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Let me just give you [an illustration] of this...taken from the Old Testament. When of old men did come before God with sin, God provided a sacrifice that should be the representative of Christ, inasmuch as the sacrifice died instead of the sinner. The Law ran, “He that sins shall die.” When men had committed sin, they brought a bullock or a sheep before the altar. They put their hand on the bullock’s head and acknowledged their guilt. By that deed, their guilt was typically removed from themselves to the bullock. Then the poor bullock, which had done no wrong, was slaughtered and cast out as a sin offering, which God had rejected. That is what every sinner must do with Christ if he is to be saved. A sinner by faith comes and puts his hand on Christ’s head. Confessing all his sin, it is not his any longer: it is put on *Christ*. Christ hangs upon the tree. He bears the cross and endures the shame; and so the sin is all gone and cast into the depths of the sea...Now, whosoever believeth in Christ Jesus hath peace with God because “he hath made Christ to be sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Now, I shall have finished the explanation of the text when I just bid you remember the consequences of this great substitution. Christ was made sin. We are made the righteousness of God. It was in the past, long further back than the memory of angels can reach...An eternal covenant was formed between the Father and the Son, wherein the Son did stipulate to suffer for His elect. The Father on His part did covenant to justify them through the Son. Oh, wondrous covenant, thou art the source of all the streams of atoning love! Eternity rolled on, time came, and with it soon came the Fall. When many years had run their round, the fullness of time arrived; and Jesus prepared to fulfill His solemn engagement. He came into the world and was made a man. From that moment, when He became a man, mark the change that was wrought in Him. Before, He had been entirely happy. He had never been miserable, never sad. But now as the effects of that terrible covenant that He had made with God, His Father begins to pour wrath upon Him.

“What!” you say, “Does God actually account His Son to be a sinner?” Yes, He does. His Son agreed to be the Substitute, to stand in the sinner’s stead. God begins with Him at His birth. He puts Him in a manger. If He had considered Him as a perfect man, He would have provided Him a throne. But considering Him as a sinner, He subjects Him to woe and poverty from beginning to end. Now, see Him grown to manhood: See Him—griefs pursue Him; sorrows follow Him. Griefs, why follow ye the Perfect? Why pursue ye the Immaculate?³⁵ Justice, why dost thou not drive these griefs away?...The answer comes: “This Man is pure in Himself, but He has made Himself impure by taking His people’s sin.” Guilt is imputed to Him, and the very imputation of guilt brings grief with all its reality. At last, I see death coming with more than its usual horrors. I see the grim skeleton with his dart well sharpened. I see behind him, Hell. I mark the grim prince of darkness and all the avengers uprising from their place of torment. I see them all besetting the Savior. I notice their terrible war upon Him in the garden. I note Him, as He lies there wallowing in His blood in fearful soul-death. I see Him as in grief and sorrow. He walks to Pilate’s bar. I see Him mocked and spit upon. I behold Him tormented, maltreated, and blasphemed. I see Him nailed to the cross! I behold the mocking continued, and the shame unabated.³⁶ I mark Him shrieking for water, and I hear Him complaining of the forsakings of God! I am astonished! Can this be *just* that a perfect being should suffer thus?—Oh, God, where art Thou, that Thou canst thus permit the oppression of the innocent? Hast thou

³⁴ **unsullied** – spotless.

³⁵ **immaculate** – spotless; undefiled; in the case of Christ, free from original sin.

³⁶ **unabated** – continuing at full strength.

ceased to be King of Justice? Else, why dost Thou not shield the perfect One? The answer comes: “Be still. He is perfect in Himself, but *He* is the sinner now. He stands in the sinner’s stead. The sinner’s guilt is on Him; therefore, it is right, it is just, it is what He hath Himself agreed to that He should be punished as if He were a sinner, that He should be frowned upon, that He should die, and that He should descend to Hades unblessed, uncomfortable, unhelped, unhonored, and unowned. This was one of the effects of the Great Exchange that Christ made.

Now, take the other side of the question, and I have done with explanation. What was the effect on us? Do you see that sinner there dabbling his hand in lust, defiling his garments with every sin the flesh had ever indulged in? Do you hear him cursing God? Do you mark him breaking every ordinance that God hath rendered sacred? But do you see him in a little season pursuing his way to heaven? He has renounced these sins. He has been converted and has forsaken them. He is going on the way to heaven! Justice, art thou asleep? That man has broken thy Law! Is *he* to go to heaven? Hark, how the fiends come rising from the pit and cry, “That man deserves to be lost! He may not be now what he used to be, but his past sins must have vengeance!” And, yet there he goes safely on his way to heaven, and I see him looking back on all the fiends that accuse him. He cries out, “Behold, who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” (Rom 8:33). And when one would think all hell would be up in arms and accuse, the grim tyrant lieth still. The fiends have naught to say! I see him turning his face heavenward to the throne of God and hear him cry, “Who is he that condemneth?”...Oh! Justice, where art thou? This man has been a sinner, a rebel. Why not *smite* him to the dust...“Nay,” says Justice, “he hath been a sinner, but I do not look upon him in that light now. I have punished Christ instead of him. That sinner is no sinner now: he is perfect.” How? Perfect? *Perfect*, because Christ was perfect. I look upon him as if he were Christ ...This is the grand result to sinners of the Great Exchange.

From a sermon delivered on Sabbath morning, July 19, 1857, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

O blessed Lord! Upon my first believing and closing with Jesus Christ, Thou didst justify me in the court of glory from all my sins, both as to guilt and pun-ishment. Upon my first act of believing, Thou didst pardon all my sins; Thou didst forgive all my iniquities; Thou didst blot out all my transgressions; and as upon my first believing Thou didst give me the remission of all my sins, so upon my first believing thou didst free me from a state of condemnation and interest me in the great salvation. Upon my first believing, I was united to Jesus Christ, and I was clothed with the righteousness of Christ, which covered all my sins and discharged me from all my transgressions. Remember, O Lord, that at the very moment of my dissolution Thou didst really, perfectly, universally, and finally forgive all my sins.—*Thomas Brooks*

CHRIST’S PENAL WORK

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

SCRIPTURE plainly teaches that God is both holy and righteous and that “justice and judgment”—not “love and pity”—are the establishment of God’s “throne” (Psa 89:14). Thus, there is that in the Divine Essence that abhors sin for its intrinsic³⁷ sinfulness, both in its respect of pollution and in its aspect of guilt. The perfections of God are therefore displayed by both forbidding and punishing the same. He has pledged Himself that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4). Therefore, in order for a full satisfaction to be rendered unto God, sin must be punished; the penalty of the Law must be enforced. Consequently, as Savior of His Church, Christ had to suffer vicariously the infliction of the Law’s curse.

What we shall now seek to show is that the sufferings and death of Christ were a satisfaction to Divine justice on behalf of the sins of His people. In case any should object against our use of the term *satisfaction*, let us point out that this very word is found in our English Bibles, being given by the translators as the equivalent for the Hebrew word that is ordinarily rendered *atonement*: “Moreover ye shall take no *satisfaction*³⁸ for the life of a murderer,

³⁷ **intrinsic** – belonging to something as a basic and essential feature of what it is.

³⁸ **satisfaction** – Hebrew = *kopher*.

which is guilty of death: but he shall surely be put to death. And ye shall take no *satisfaction* for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest” (Num 35:31-32).

The deep humiliation to which the Son of God was subjected in taking upon Him the form of a servant and being made “in the likeness of sin’s flesh,” was a judicial infliction imposed upon Him by the Father, yet voluntarily submitted to by Himself. The very purpose of His humiliation, His obedience, and His sufferings makes them *pe-nal*,³⁹ for they were unto the satisfying of the claims of God’s Law upon His people. In being “made under the law” (Gal 4:4), Christ became subject to all that the Law enjoins: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law” (Rom 3:19), which means the Law calls for the fulfillment of its terms. “Christ, in *our room* and stead, did both by doing and suffering satisfy Divine justice...the legislative, the retributive, and the vindictive⁴⁰ in the most perfect manner, fulfilling all the righteousness of the Law, which the Law otherwise required of us in order to impunity⁴¹ and to our having a right to eternal life.”⁴²

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust” (1Pe 3:18). The reference here must not be restricted to what Christ endured at the hands of God while He hung upon the Cross, nor to all He passed through during that day and preceding night. Beware of limiting the Word of God! No. The *entirety* of His humiliation is here included. *The whole life of Christ was one of sufferings*. Therefore was He designated “the Man of sorrows,” not simply, “sorrow.” From His birth to His death, suffering and sorrow marked Him as their legitimate Victim. While yet an infant, He was driven into exile to escape the fury of those who sought His life. That was but the prophetic forerunner of His whole earthly course. The cup of woe, put to His lips at Bethlehem, was never removed until He drained its bitter dregs at Calvary.

He experienced every variety of suffering. He tasted *poverty* in its severest rigor. Born in a stable, owning no property on earth, depend-ent upon the charity of others (Luk 8:3), oftentimes being worse sit-uated than the inferior orders of creation (Mat 8:20). He suffered reproach in all its bitterness. The most malignant⁴³ accusations, the vilest aspersions,⁴⁴ the most cutting sarcasm were directed against His person and character. He was taunted with being a glutton, a winebibber,⁴⁵ a deceiver, a blasphemer, a devil. Therefore do we hear Him crying, “Reproach hath broken my heart” (Psa 69:20). He experienced temptation in all its malignity. The prince of darkness assailed Him with all his ingenuity and power, causing his infernal legions to attack Him, coming against Him like “strong bulls of Bashan,” gaping on Him with their mouths like ravening and roaring lions (Psa 22:12-13). Above all, He suffered the wrath of God, so that He was “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Mat 26:38), in “an agony” (Luk 22:44), and ultimately, “forsaken of God.”

What then is the explanation of these unparalleled “sufferings”? Why was the most perfect obedience followed by the most terrible punishment? Why was unsullied holiness visited with unutterable anguish? David declared, “Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken” (Psa 37:25). *Why* then was the Righteous One abandoned by God? Only one answer is possible. Only one answer fully meets all the facts of the case. Only one answer clears the government of God. In taking the place of offending sinners, *Christ became obligated to discharge all their liabilities*. This involved bearing *their* sins, being charged with *their* guilt, suffering *their* punishment. Accordingly, God dealt with Him as the Representative of His criminal people, inflicting upon Him all that their sins merited. As the sin-bearing Substitute of His people, Christ was justly exposed to all the dreadful consequences of God’s manifested displeasure.

Of old the question was asked, “Who *ever* perished being innocent?” (Job 4:7), to which we may without the slightest hesitation answer, “None.” God never has and never will smite the innocent. Therefore, before His punitive wrath could fall upon Christ, the sins of His people must first be transferred to Him, and this is precisely what Scripture affirms. Remarkably was this foreshadowed of old in the great type of Israel’s annual Day of Atonement: “And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat” (Lev 16:21). So too was it plainly prophesied, “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...he bare the

³⁹ **penal** – subject to punishment under the law.

⁴⁰ **legislative...retributive...vindictive** – the legal, punishing, vengeful aspects of justice.

⁴¹ **impunity** – freedom from punishment.

⁴² Herman Witsius (1636-1708), *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull), 207.

⁴³ **malignant** – extremely wicked.

⁴⁴ **aspersions** – slanders; attacks on someone’s character.

⁴⁵ **winebibber** – one who habitually drinks too much wine or alcoholic beverage.

sin of many” (Isa 53:6, 12). So also is it expressly affirmed in the New Testament, “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28). Once again we would point out there is not a hint in these passages that Christ bore the sins of His people only while He was hanging upon the Cross. We are aware that many have so affirmed, but in doing so they have not only been guilty of adding to the Word of God, but also of flatly *contradicting* it.

We have already pointed out that the expression of Romans 8:3, made “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” clearly presupposes the transfer of His people’s sins to Christ, and that what happened immediately after His birth was in full keeping with this fact and cannot be understood apart from it. That He was “circumcised” (Luk 2:21) not only proved that He had been “made in the likeness of men” (Phi 2:7), but also evidenced that He had been made “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” So too the ceremonial “purification” of His mother (Luk 2:22) and her presentation of a “sin-offering” (Lev 12:2, 6) was in perfect keeping with the fact that, though His humanity was immaculate, yet He had entered this world officially guilty.

As little children, we sinned—“the wicked are estranged⁴⁶ from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa 58:3)—and therefore as a child Christ suffered. [He] suffered not only as our Substitute, but because our sins had been transferred to Him. In our youth, we sinned; and as a youth Christ suffered, and suffered at the hands of God as His own words clearly testify: “I am afflicted and ready to die from youth up: I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted” (Psa 88:15). In the prime of our manhood, we sinned; and in the prime of His manhood, Christ suffered. Let us refer once more to His being assailed by Satan. Hebrews 2:18 tells us that He “suffered being tempted,” and that very suffering was penal. That Christ’s “suffering” under Satan was designed and appointed as an infliction from God is proved by the statement that “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Mat 4:1).

Man having allowed himself to be overcome by Satan, God has by a just sentence delivered him up as a slave to his tyranny. Therefore was it necessary that Christ, as His sinful people’s Substitute, should be exposed to the harrassings of the Devil, that in this respect also He might satisfy Divine justice. Most assuredly Satan and his agents could never have assailed Christ had He not been so (legally) charged with the guilt of our crimes that God righteously exposed Him to injuries from them (Act 2:23). The elect themselves, as sinners, were subject to Satan’s power (Col 1:13), and that by the righteous sentence of the Judge of all the earth. Therefore were they not only the “prey of the mighty,” but also were “lawful captives” (Isa 49:24). Therefore, as Christ came here as Surety in their room, He, by virtue of God’s sentence, also became subject to the buffetings of Satan.

“Christ’s passive or suffering obedience is not to be confined to what He experienced in the garden and on the cross. This suffering was the culmination of His piacular⁴⁷ sorrow, but not the whole of it. Everything in His human and earthly career that was distressing belongs to His passive obedience. It is a true remark of Jonathan Edwards that the blood of Christ’s circumcision was as really a part of His vicarious atonement as the blood that flowed from His pierced side. And not only His suffering proper, but His humiliation also was expiatory.”⁴⁸ “The satisfaction or propitiation⁴⁹ of Christ consists either in His suffering evil, or His being subject to abasement⁵⁰... Whatever Christ was subject to, which was the judicial fruit of sin, had the nature of satisfaction for sin. But not only proper suffering, but all abasement and depression of the state and circumstances of mankind (human nature) below its primitive honor and dignity (such as His body remaining under death, and body and soul remaining separate) are the judicial fruits of sin.”⁵¹

When the Scriptures speak of the satisfaction of Christ, they ascribe it to His sufferings in general. “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa 53:4), that is, He suffered all the pains and sorrows due to us from sin. It is to be most carefully noted that the inspired declaration “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6) comes before “He was oppressed” and before “he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” It was at the commencement of His public ministry, and not while He hung upon the Cross, that God moved one of His

⁴⁶ **estranged** – turned aside.

⁴⁷ **piacular** – making atonement for sin.

⁴⁸ William Greenough Thayer Shedd (1828-1894), *Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 2 (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1891), 430.

⁴⁹ **expiatory...propitiation** – “Expiation has reference to the *guilt* of sin. To expiate is to remove or cover the guilt of sin. Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the Biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice.” (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382.)

⁵⁰ **abasement** – humiliation.

⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), “A History of the Work of Redemption” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust), 574.

servants to cry, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (Joh 1:29). Christ was brought “to the slaughter” before the three hours of darkness, yet even then “affliction” lay upon Him; and our iniquity was exacted of Him. So too this very chapter (Isa 53) ascribes our “healing” to the stripes that He received from men as plainly as other passages attribute our being delivered from the curse of the Law through God’s visiting Him with its curse.

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example” (1Pe 2:21). “To *suffer* here denotes to be in affliction; for all those sufferings are here intended in which Christ has left us an example of patience. These sufferings He affirms to be for us, that is, undergone as well in our stead as for our good. For this is ordinarily the signification of the word *huper*...And that this is the true meaning of Peter, we conclude hence, that in 3:18 he says, ‘Christ suffered for sins,’ namely, that He might be ‘the propitiation for our sins’ (1Jo 4:10).”⁵²

When the sovereign rights of God are emphasized, there is generally raised the objection that we are hereby “reducing man to a mere machine.” Many are they who are prepared to hold a brief⁵³ for human responsibility. But rare indeed is it that we ever hear anything about *transferred* responsibility. Yet, at this point lies one of the chief wonders and glories of the Gospel. The responsibility of God’s people was transferred to Christ: He assumed their liabilities, made Himself chargeable with their debts, *answerable to every demand of the Law against them*. Had this not been the case, how could God have right-eously laid the iniquities of His people upon the head of His Holy Son? Still less could He have called for the sword of Justice to smite Him. It was because Christ was “made sin” for us that He was also “made a curse” for us: the latter could not be without the former. As this is a point of such vital importance, we must amplify a little further.

Hebrews 7:22 declares that Christ is Surety of a better covenant: He was the Sponsor of His people, as Judah undertook to be for Benjamin. “I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever” (Gen 43:9). Or, as Paul was for Onesimus, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it” (Phm 1:18-19). Just so did Christ engage Himself unto His Father for us: “Reckon to Me whatever they owe Thee, and I will satisfy for it.” “A surety, whose name is put into a bond,⁵⁴ is not only bound to pay the debt, but he makes it his own debt also, even as well as it is the principal’s, so that he may be sued and charged for the debt. So Christ, when He once made Himself a Surety, He so put Himself in the room of sinners, that what the Law could lay to their charge, it might lay to His.”⁵⁵

Christ must take on Him the guilt of our transgressions before He could take our punishment upon Him, and so satisfy Divine justice on our behalf. That He did so is demonstrated by His own words. It is indeed remarkable to find how that Christ actually owned our sins as being *His*. First, in the 40th Psalm: That this Psalm is Messianic, we know from its quotation in Hebrews 10. That it contains the very words of Christ is plainly evident from verses 7–11. He is still the Speaker in verse 12, where He declared “For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.” What a proof that the sins of His people had been transferred to Him! Second, in the 69th, another great Messianic Psalm: There too we find Him saying, “O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee” (v. 5). How unmistakably do those words show our sins had been reckoned to Him! Those sins were His not by perpetration,⁵⁶ but by imputation.⁵⁷

“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on [to] the tree” (1Pe 2:24). “ ‘Our sins’ here are our liabilities to punishment on account of our violations of the Divine Law and the necessary consequences of those liabilities; in other words, guilt in the sense of binding over to punishment, and punishment itself.”⁵⁸...In entering the Law-place of His people, Christ became answerable to the righteousness of God on their behalf. Whatever they owed must be exacted from their Sponsor: He must pay their debts, suffer the full penalty of their iniquities, and receive sin’s wages in their room. Christ now became exposed to all that the holiness of God must inflict upon sin.

⁵² Witsius, *Economy*, Vol. 1, 219.

⁵³ **hold a brief** – to express oneself like an advocate rather than an unbiased person.

⁵⁴ **bond** – certificate of debt.

⁵⁵ Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), “Of Christ the Mediator” in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol. 5 (repr., Eureka, CA: Tanski, 1996), 184.

⁵⁶ **perpetration** – the act of committing or performing.

⁵⁷ **imputation** – being charged to one’s account.

⁵⁸ John Brown of Edinburgh (1784-1854), *The First Epistle of Peter*, Vol. 1 (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 523.

Therefore we read, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal 3:13). “The cross was accursed, not only in the opinion of men, but by the decree of the Divine Law. Therefore when Christ was lifted up upon it, He rendered Himself obnoxious to the curse.”⁵⁹

The very mode of death that God appointed for His Son reveals to us the penal nature of it. The Cross was no mere “accident,” as though it made no difference what form His death took. Fundamental reasons rendered it expedient and necessary that the Surety should die a death that was accursed of God; hence, the frequent reference in the New Testament to the “cross” and the “tree” (*cf.* John 12:32-33). At Calvary, God’s terrible curse on sin was publicly displayed, of which the cross was not the cause but the *symbol* (*cf.* Joh 3:14). Under the Mosaic Law (to which the Apostle refers in Gal 3:13), hanging on a tree was a death reserved for great criminals. Hence, the force of the word *tree* in 1 Peter 2:24. Christ hanging upon the tree was the public testimony to God’s *curse* on Him. “The cause of the curse was not the hanging on the tree, but the sin with which He was charged. That mode of punishment exhibited that He was the object of God’s holy displeasure, not indeed because He was suspended on the tree, but because He was the sin-bearer. The punishment of the offenses for which that ignominious⁶⁰ penalty was allotted was then inflicted. Divine wisdom appointed that He Who bore the sin of the world should be exposed as a curse, for the Divine displeasure was there most awfully displayed.”⁶¹

As to why this means and method of death was selected by God out of all others possible—poisoning, stoning, beheading, etc.—Genesis 3 supplies the answer: “As the fatal sin which diffused the curse over the human race was connected with the forbidden ‘tree,’ God wisely ordered that the last Adam should expiate sin by being suspended on a tree; and He appointed in the Law (Deu 21:22-23) such a symbol of the curse as reminded all men of the origin of the Divine curse on the world. He would not have the curse removed in any other way.”⁶² Among the Romans, death by crucifixion was the deepest possible humiliation. It was the most degrading of punishments, inflicted only on slaves and the lowest of the people. If freemen were at any time subjected to crucifixion for great crimes, such as robbery, high treason, or sedition, the sentence could not be executed until they were put into the catalogue of slaves, and that by the utmost humiliation. Their liberty was taken from them by servile stripes⁶³ and scourging, as was done to Christ. Thus, the curse of God’s Law was executed upon the Head and Substitute of His people. To “preach Christ crucified” (1Co 1:23) is to proclaim and expound His being “made a curse for us.”

Because Christ was “made sin” and “made a curse” for His people, the wrath of God’s holiness flamed against Him and the sword of His justice pierced Him. “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7; *cf.* Mat 26:31). God inflicted punishment on Christ as if He had been the personal offender. “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (Isa 53:10). As all the sufferings of men, whether inflicted immediately⁶⁴ by God or mediately⁶⁵ by Satan or men (Jer 2:15–17), arise from the demerits of sin. So all the sufferings of Christ—from man, Satan, God—arose from the demerits of His peoples’ sins imputed to their Substitute.

The punishment that God meted out to Christ was the very punishment that was due His people. That He was accursed of God is seen from His hanging on the tree. That He received sin’s wages was evidenced by God’s forsaking Him. That He was numbered with transgressors was exhibited by His dying between two thieves. True, He did not suffer eternally, for the eternity of our punishment was only a circumstance arising from our incapacity to suffer the whole weight of God’s wrath in a brief season, and therefore the brevity of duration of Christ’s sufferings is no valid objection against the identity of penalty that He received. Moreover, the infinite dignity of His Person more than compensated the Law. “To the enlightened eye, there is found on the cross another inscription besides that which Pilate ordered to be written there: THE VICTIM OF GUILT. THE WAGES OF SIN.”⁶⁶

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, reprinted by Chapel Library.

⁵⁹ John Calvin (1509-1564), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, xvi, 6.

⁶⁰ **ignominious** – marked by shame or disgrace.

⁶¹ George Smeaton (1814-1889), *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles* (Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 14.

⁶² Smeaton, *Atonement*, 15.

⁶³ **servile stripes** – marks and wounds on the back of a slave from a whip.

⁶⁴ **immediately** – directly, without the help of someone or something.

⁶⁵ **mediately** – indirectly, by the use of means.

⁶⁶ Brown, *First Peter*, Vol. 2, 143.

The death of Christ on the cross, it was a bitter death, a sorrowful death, a bloody death. The bitter thoughts of His sufferings put Him into a most dreadful agony: “Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luk 22:44)...The things that our Savior strove against were not only the terror of death, as other men are wont to do—for then many Christians and martyrs might have seemed more constant and courageous than He—but with *the terrible justice of God*, pouring out His high anger and indignation upon Him on the account of all the sins of His chosen that were laid upon Him, than which nothing could be more dreadful (Isa 53:4-6). Christ was in a vehement conflict in His soul, through the deepest sense of His Father’s wrath against sinners, for whom He now stood as a Surety and Redeemer. And for a close of this particular, let me say that God’s justice that we have provoked, being fully satisfied by the inestimable merit of Christ’s passion, is the surest and highest ground of consolation that we have in this world.—
Thomas Brooks

AN ENTIRE PARDON

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.”—Zechariah 13:1

WE have already...remarked upon the incompetency of natural reason to understand spiritual truth: neither the nature, the harmony, or the end of Divine truth can it discern. This incapacity may be traced, not to a deficiency of mental endowment or to the extreme abstruseness⁶⁷ of revelation—for the weakest intellect enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God may grasp the profoundest doctrine in the great system of theology, so far as the revelation of that doctrine extends—but to the want⁶⁸ of a *spiritually-renewed mind*. This is the cause and this only...It follows then as a self-evident truth that the mind must be changed and changed by God Himself before Divine truth will either be understood or received. Hence, we find the Apostle, in behalf of the Ephesian Christians, thus praying: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened” (Eph 1:17-18).

Of all the doctrines of the Gospel, thus dark and inexplicable to an unrenewed mind, is the doctrine of Christ’s Atonement in its especial and gracious design. *This can only be understood by a mind awakened to the nature and turpitude⁶⁹ of sin*. As the expiation of sin was the great design of Christ’s wondrous death, so no individual thus ignorant of sin, however vast his mental powers and however firm his belief in the truth of Divine revelation, can discover and welcome this truth...It is to this natural darkness, this ignorance of sin, this want of the Spirit’s teaching that we are to attribute all the false and erroneous views that men have advanced touching the nature and design of Christ’s death.

It is our solemn belief that all error in theology, especially that which undermines the Atonement, has its rise in the setting aside the Law of God. Let the Law be fully recognized in its Divine authority, its inflexible dignity, and its spotless purity; let its condemnatory sentence be felt in the soul; let all hope of justification⁷⁰ by its obedience be swept away; and let the sinner stand forth in the full blaze of its terrors—then will be seen the absolute *necessity* of an Atonement, precisely such an Atonement as the adorable Redeemer offered upon the cross. No individual then, taught by the Spirit, Who is emphatically designated “The Spirit of *Truth*,” made to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin as against a holy God, emptied of all self-sufficiency, the eye open to the inward plague and laid prostrate in the dust as a poor, broken-hearted sinner—no individual thus taught would ever affirm that Jesus died

⁶⁷ **abstruseness** – the quality of being difficult to understand.

⁶⁸ **want** – lack.

⁶⁹ **turpitude** – corruption; moral perversion.

⁷⁰ **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32)

with any other design than that for which He *did* die: *to offer to Divine Justice a full and infinite satisfaction for sin*. This brings us to the immediate discussion of the subject.

May we feel that the ground on which we now stand is holy. If there be a subject, the consideration of which we should approach with caution, humility, and prayer, it is this. May our hearts be lifted up to God for the teachings of His Spirit, Whose blessed office in the economy of grace is to glorify Christ: Taking of the things that belong to Him and showing them to the soul (Joh 16:14). O for His holy anointing while we treat of this stupendous subject—*Christ presenting Himself a sacrifice for sin!* For the purpose of presenting the subject clearly before the mind of the reader, we shall first adduce⁷¹ those prominent portions of God’s Word that declare the end and design of Christ’s death to be an Atonement for sin. It will then be appropriate to show that the Atonement of Christ is a *full and entire blotting out of the sins of His people...*

The Word of God, the only rule of faith and duty, distinctly and invariably represents the death of Jesus as a *sacrifice* and the especial and gracious design of that sacrifice: *an atonement*⁷² *for sin*. If this is denied, how are we to interpret the following remarkable passages? “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5-6). “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat 26:28). “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7). “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pe 1:18-19). “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 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 9:13-14). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). How perfectly unintelligible are these declarations of God’s Word if we regard them not as so many affirmations of the great doctrine in question! Let not the reader turn away from God’s Word. If he be a disbeliever in the doctrine of Christ’s vicarious sufferings, let him be cautious how he tampers with these solemn declarations. They affirm the doctrine of the Atonement or nothing at all. They possess no meaning if interpreted in any other light. Recur⁷³ again to the amazing expressions: “Wounded for our *transgressions*.” “Bruised for our *iniquities*.” On Him the “*iniquity* of us all.” “Blood shed for the remission of *sins*.” “Died for the *ungodly*.” “Made *sin*.” “Through his blood the forgiveness of *sins*.” “Propitiation for our *sins*.” What do we see here, but the Atoning blood—the full satisfaction—the bearing of sin—the surety, the *substitute*?

And how shall we account for the sufferings of Christ, which were intense and mysterious, if not on the ground of their vicarious character? Those sufferings were intense in the extreme. There was a severity in them that, if not required by Divine justice, would be perfectly unaccountable. Heaven, Earth, and Hell—all were in league against Him. Survey His eventful history: mark every step that He took from Bethlehem to Calvary. What do we learn of His sufferings, but that they were of the most extraordinary and intense character? His enemies, like dogs of war, were let loose upon Him. His professed followers themselves stood aghast at the scenes through which their Lord was passing—one betraying Him, another denying Him, and all, in the hour of His extremity, forsaking Him. Is it any wonder that in the anguish of His soul His suffering humanity should exclaim, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:42). In that awful moment, all the waves and billows of God’s wrath, due to the sins of His people, were passing over Him. The Father, the last resource of sympathy, veiled His face and withdrew from Him His sensible presence. On the cross, draining the cup of sorrow, He fulfilled the prophecy that spake of Him: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me” (Isa 63:3).

⁷¹ **adduce** – bring forward for consideration.

⁷² **atonement** – *literally* “at-one-ment”; the condition of being *at one* with another; theologically, atonement means reconciliation with God by removing or covering the guilt of sin; this was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

⁷³ **recur** – return in thought.

His sufferings, too, were mysterious. Why a holy, harmless Being Whose whole life had been one act of unparalleled beneficence⁷⁴ should be doomed to persecution so severe, to sufferings so acute, and to a death so painful and ignominious,⁷⁵ the denier of the atonement must be embarrassed to account. But the doctrine of a vicarious sacrifice explains it all and presents the only key to the mystery. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). All the mystery now is gone. He was “made sin for us.” He was “made a curse for us.” He bore the sin and consequently the penalty of sin. Had we been left, Christian reader, to bear our sins, we must inevitably have borne alone the punishment of our sins. But Jesus took upon Him our sins. For this, He became a party in the covenant of redemption.⁷⁶ For this, He assumed our nature. For this, He sorrowed in Gethsemane. For this, the Law of God exacted its utmost claim. And for this, the justice of God inflicted the utmost penalty. O what a truth is this! The Son of God offering Himself up a sacrifice for sin! He Who knew no sin, Who was holy, harmless, and undefiled; not one thought of evil in His heart, yet made sin or a sin offering! *O the bigness of the thought!* If God had not Himself declared it, we could not have believed it though an angel’s trump had announced it. God Himself must proclaim it! And because He has so proclaimed it, we believe it. God alone can write it upon the heart. “O thou blessed and adorable Immanuel! Was this the end and design of Thy intense and mysterious sufferings? Was it that Thou shouldest obey, bear the sin, endure the curse, and bow Thy head in death that I might go free? Was it in my stead and in my behalf? O love unexampled! O grace infinite and free! That God should become incarnate: that the Holy One should so take upon Him sin to be dealt with by stern justice, as though He were Himself the sinner; that He should drain the cup, give His back to the smiter, endure the shame and the spitting, and at last be suspended upon the cross and pour out His last drop of most precious blood—and all this for *me*—for *me* a rebel—for *me* a worm—for *me* the chief of sinners! Be astonished, O heavens! Be amazed, O earth! Was ever love like this?”

It will now be appropriate to show from God’s Word that the Atonement of the blessed Redeemer was a *full and entire blotting out of the sins of the believer.* Need we say aught upon the vast importance of this truth? Need we say how closely it stands connected with the peace, the sanctification, and the eternal glory of the sinner that hangs on Christ? Let not the reader be satisfied to rest upon the mere surface of the truth that Christ has made an Atonement for sin. This may be believed and yet the full blessedness, peace, and sanctification of it not enjoyed. Why? Because he enters not fully into the experience of the truth. Shall we not say, too, because his views of sin rest but on the surface of sin’s exceeding sinfulness? Deep views of sin will ever result in deep views of the Sacrifice for sin: inadequate knowledge of *sin*, inadequate knowledge of *Christ*; low views of *self*, high views of *Christ*. Be satisfied then not to rest upon the surface of this wondrous truth. May God the Eternal Spirit now lead us into it!

Before we consider the completeness of Christ’s Atonement, it may be proper to glance at the basis or cause of that completeness. This arises from the infinite dignity of His Person: His Godhead forms the basis of His perfect work. It guarantees, so to speak, the glorious result of His Atonement. It was this that gave perfection to His obedience and virtue to His Atonement. It was this that made the blood He shed efficacious⁷⁷ in the pardon of sin and the righteousness He wrought out complete in the justification of the soul. His entire work would have been wanting but for His Godhead. No created Savior—that dream of the Socinian⁷⁸—could have given full satisfaction to an infinite Law broken by man and calling aloud for vengeance. How could such a sacrifice, as we would suppose a created Savior to offer, have “magnified the law, and made it honourable” (Isa 42:21)?—utterly *impossible!* A finite being had broken it—an infinite Being must repair it. Obedience was required in every respect equal in glory and dignity to the Law that was violated. The rights of the Divine government must be maintained, the purity of the Divine nature must be guarded, and the honor of the Divine Law must be vindicated. To accomplish this, God Himself must become flesh; to carry this fully out, the incarnate God must die! O depth of wisdom and of grace! O love infinite, love rich, love free!...Stamped, as the work of Christ is, with the infinite glory

⁷⁴ **beneficence** – doing good.

⁷⁵ **ignominious** – marked by shame and disgrace.

⁷⁶ **covenant of redemption** – term used by some to describe the eternal purpose of redemption: God the Father purposed to give a people and a kingdom to His Son, and God the Son agreed to accomplish this purpose by His life, death, and resurrection.

⁷⁷ **efficacious** – effective.

⁷⁸ **Socinian** – a follower of the teachings of Socinus; one who rejects the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and original sin; influenced the development of Unitarian theology.

and dignity of His Godhead, it will now be an easy and a delightful task to trace its perfection as it is seen first, *in the entire blotting out of all sin*, and second, *in the complete justification of the person*.

The pardon of a believer's sins is an *entire* pardon. It is the full pardon of *all* his sins. It [would be] no pardon to him if it were not an *entire* pardon. If it were but a partial blotting out of the thick cloud—if it were but a partial cancelling of the bond⁷⁹—if it were but a forgiveness of *some* sins only—then the Gospel were no glad tidings to his soul. The Law of God has brought him in guilty of an entire violation. The justice of God demands a satisfaction equal to the enormity of the sins committed and of the guilt incurred. The Holy Spirit has convinced him of his utter helplessness, his entire bankruptcy. What rapture would kindle in his bosom at the announcement of a *partial* atonement—of a *half* Savior—of a *part* payment of the debt? Not one throb of joyous sensation would it produce. On the contrary, this very mockery of his woe would but deepen the anguish of his spirit. But, go to the soul, weary and heavy-laden with sin, mourning over its vileness, its helplessness; and proclaim the Gospel. Tell him that the Atonement that Jesus offered on Calvary was a full satisfaction for his sins. That *all* his sins were borne and blotted out in that awful moment. That the bond that Divine Justice held against the sinner was *fully* cancelled by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and that, appeased and satisfied, God was “ready to pardon.” How beautiful will be the feet that convey to him tidings so transporting as this! And are not these statements perfectly accordant⁸⁰ with the declarations of God's own Word? Let us ascertain.

What was the ark symbolical of, alluded to by the Apostle in the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, which contained the manna, Aaron's rod, and the tables of the covenant, over which stood the cherubims of glory shadowing the *mercy seat*? What, but the entire covering of sin? For as the covering of the ark did hide the Law and Testimony, so did the Lord Jesus Christ hide the sins of His chosen, covenant people—not from the eye of God's omniscience, but from the *eye of the Law*. They stand legally acquitted. So entire was the work of Jesus, so infinite and satisfactory His obedience, the Law of God pronounces them acquitted—and *can never bring them into condemnation*. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1). “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died” (Rom 8:34). How could the Apostle, with any truth, have made a declaration so astounding and uttered a challenge as dauntless as this if the point we are now endeavoring to establish were not strictly as we affirm it to be?

And does not the phraseology which the Holy Ghost employs in announcing the doctrine of Divine forgiveness confirm the statement we have made? “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa 44:22). Where would be the constraining power of the motive to “return” to God, but on the ground of a full and entire blotting out of all sin? *This*...subdues, overcomes, and wins back God's wandering child. *This*...abases the soul, deepens the conviction of its vileness; makes the sin of departure, of ingratitude, of rebellion so abhorrent, when on the broad basis of a full and free blotting out of sin, God bids the soul “return”: “I have blotted out all thy sins, therefore return. Though thou hast gone after other lovers, though thou hast departed from Me, forgotten and forsaken Me, yet have I blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions: return, for I have redeemed thee.” Again, “In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found” (Jer 5:20). “He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic 7:19). What an astounding truth is contained in these two passages! In the one, it is declared that if the iniquity of Israel and the sin of Judah be sought for, they shall not be found. So entire was the blotting out, so glorious was the work of Jesus, so perfect His obedience that if the eye of God's holy Law searches—and where can it not penetrate?—it cannot discover them. In the other, it is declared that so fathomless are the depths of that sea of atoning blood, which Christ has poured out, that in it are cast, never to be found again, *all the sins* of the believer. So that the trembling soul may exclaim, “Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isa 38:17).

And who can read without deep emotion these affecting announcements by the God of heaven? Gently chiding His wayward yet beloved people, He says...“And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me” (Jer 33:8)...“For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them

⁷⁹ **bond** – certificate of death.

⁸⁰ **accordant** – in agreement.

that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psa 103:11-12).

Look up, ye saints of God, who are disconsolate⁸¹ through fear of condemnation! See all your sins charged to the account of your mighty Surety. Yea, see them all laid upon Him as your Substitute. See Him bearing them away—sinking them in the ocean of His blood—casting them behind His back. Look up and rejoice! Let not the indwelling of sin, the remains of corruption cause you to overlook this amazing truth—the *entire blotting out of all your sins, through the atoning blood of your adorable Immanuel*. It is *truth*, and it is your privilege to live in the holy enjoyment of it. Fully received into the heart by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, its tendency will be of the most holy, sanctifying, abasing character. It will weaken the power of sin. It will draw up the heart in pantings for Divine conformity. It will deaden the influence of the objects of sense, expel the love of the world and of self, impart tenderness to the conscience, and cause the soul to go softly—“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10).

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Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Baptist, and later Anglican, minister; in 1861 spoke at the opening of Spurgeon’s Tabernacle in London; born in England.

He did die. He did lay down His life. He did make His soul an offering for my sins. He did become a curse. He did endure thy infinite wrath. He did give complete satisfaction and a full compensation unto Thy justice for all my sins, debts, trespasses. *This is my plea, O Lord! By this plea I shall stand.*—*Thomas Brooks*

SATISFACTION AND SUBSTITUTION OUTLINED

John Owen (1616-1683)

THE sum of what the Scripture reveals about this great truth, commonly called the “satisfaction of Christ,” may be reduced unto these ensuing⁸² heads:

FIRST: That Adam, being made upright, sinned against God and all mankind, all his posterity in him: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen 1:27). “And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?” (Gen 3:11). “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc 7:29). “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned...Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom 5:12, 18-19a).

SECONDLY: That, by this sin of our first parents, all men are brought into an estate of sin and apostasy from God and of enmity unto Him: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18; *cf.* Eph 2:1; Col 2:13).

THIRDLY: That in this state all men continue in sin against God, nor of themselves can do otherwise: “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after

⁸¹ **disconsolate** – sad beyond comforting.

⁸² **ensuing** – following.

God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom 3:10-12).

FOURTHLY: That the justice and holiness of God, as He is the supreme Governor and Judge of all the world, require that sin be punished: “That will by no means clear *the guilty*” (Exo 34:7). “For he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins” (Jos 24:19). “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing;⁸³ the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man” (Psa 5:4-6). “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Hab 1:13). “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa 33:14). “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death” (Rom 1:32). “Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man) God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?” (Rom 3:5-6). “It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2Th 1:6). “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29; cf. Deu 4:24).

FIFTHLY: That God hath also engaged His veracity⁸⁴ and faithfulness in the sanction of the Law [so as] not to leave sin unpunished: “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). “Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them” (Deu 27:26). In this state and condition, mankind, had they been left without divine aid and help, must have perished eternally.

SIXTHLY: That God, out of His infinite goodness, grace, and love to mankind, sent His only Son to save and deliver them out of this condition: “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (Joh 3:16-17). “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “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” (1Jo 4:9). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). “... Even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1Th 1:10).

SEVENTHLY: That this love was the *same* in Father and Son, [carried out] distinctly in the manner that shall be afterward declared. So, vain are the pretences of men who, from the love of the Father in this matter, would argue against the love of the Son or on the contrary.

EIGHTHLY: That the way in general, whereby the Son of God being incarnate was to save lost sinners, was by a *substitution of Himself*, according to the design and appointment of God, in the room of those whom He was to save: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:7-8). “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). “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18). All these expressions undeniably evince⁸⁵ a *substitution* of Christ as to suffering in the stead of them whom He was to save. [This], in general, is all that we intend by His satisfaction, namely, that He was made “sin for us,” a “curse for us,” “died for us,” that is, in our stead that we might be saved from the wrath to come...

NINTHLY: This way of His saving sinners is in particular several ways expressed in the Scripture. As,

1. That He offered Himself a sacrifice to God to make atonement for our sins [by] His death and sufferings: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (Isa 53:10). “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Joh 1:29). “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph 5:2). [He] as “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God,

⁸³ **leasing** – lies.

⁸⁴ **veracity** – truthfulness.

⁸⁵ **evince** – clearly display.

to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 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 9:11-14).

2. That He redeemed us by paying a price, a ransom, for our redemption: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mar 10:45). “For ye are bought with a price” (1Co 6:20; 7:23). “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1Ti 2:6). “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity” (Ti 2:14). “For ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pe 1:18-19).

3. That He bare our sins or the punishment due unto them: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all...For he shall bear their iniquities” (53:5-6, 11). “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24).

4. That He answered the Law and the penalty of it: “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). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law” (Gal 4:4-5).

5. That He died for sin and sinners to expiate the one and in the stead of the other: “He was delivered for our offences” (Rom 4:25). “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1Co 15:3). “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead” (2Co 5:14).

6. Hence, on the part of God it is affirmed that “he spared him not, but delivered him up for us all” (Rom 8:32). [He] caused all our iniquities to meet upon Him (Isa 53:6).

7. The effect hereof was (1) That the righteousness of God was glorified. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins” (Rom 3:25-26). (2) The Law [was] fulfilled and satisfied, as in the places before quoted, chapter 8:3-4; Gal 3:13; 4:4-5. (3) God [was] reconciled. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:18-19). “He made reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). (4) Atonement was made for sin: “By whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11); and peace was made with God: “For he is our peace, who hath made both one...that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:14, 16). (5) [He] made an end of sin. “To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan 9:24)...

For in that “the chastisement of our peace was upon him” and that “by his stripes we are healed,” He being punished that we might go free, [Christ] became a captain of salvation unto all that do obey Him (Heb 5:9)...These are the things that are indispensably required of us to believe that we may be able to direct and regulate our obedience according to the mind and will of God...If the Lord Christ, according to the will of the Father and by His own counsel and choice, was substituted and did substitute Himself as the Mediator of the covenant in the room and in the stead of sinners that they might be saved and therein bare their sins, or the punishment due unto their sins, by undergoing the curse and penalty of the Law, and therein also, according to the will of God, offered up Himself for a propitiatory, expiatory sacrifice to make atonement for sin and reconciliation for sinners that the justice of God being appeased and the Law fulfilled, they might go free or be delivered from the wrath to come; and if therein also He paid a real satisfactory price for their redemption, then He made satisfaction to God for sin. These are the things that we intend by that expression of *satisfaction*.

From “A Brief Declaration of Vindication of The Doctrine of the Trinity” in
The Works of John Owen, Vol. 2, reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust.

John Owen (1616-1683): Congregational pastor and theologian; called “The Prince of the Puritans”; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, England.

GOD’S WISDOM IN CHRIST’S SUBSTITUTION

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God”—Ephesians 3:10

THE wisdom appearing in the way of salvation by Jesus Christ is far above the wisdom of the angels. For here, it is mentioned as one end of God in revealing the contrivance⁸⁶ of our salvation that the angels thereby might see and know how great and manifold the wisdom of God is, to hold forth the divine wisdom to the angels’ view and admiration...It is mentioned as a wisdom such as they had never seen before, not in God, much less in themselves. That now might be known how manifold the wisdom of God is, now four thousand years since the creation. In all that time, the angels had always beheld the face of God and had been studying God’s works of creation. Yet they never, until that day, had seen anything like that, never knew how manifold God’s wisdom is, as now they knew it by the church!...And,

1. WE WILL CONSIDER THE CHOICE OF THE PERSON TO BE OUR REDEEMER. When God designed the redemption of mankind, His great wisdom appears in that He pitched upon⁸⁷ His own, His only-begotten Son to be the person to perform the work. He was a redeemer of God’s own choosing, and therefore He is called in Scripture, “God’s elect” (Isa 62:1). The wisdom of choosing *this* Person to be the Redeemer appears in His being every way a fit person for this undertaking. It was necessary that the person that is the redeemer should be a divine person. None but a divine person was sufficient for this great work. The work is infinitely unequal to any creature. It was requisite⁸⁸ that the redeemer of sinners should be himself infinitely holy. None could take away the infinite evil of sin but one that was infinitely far from and contrary to sin himself. *Christ is a fit person upon this account.*

It was requisite that the person, in order to be sufficient for this undertaking, should be one of infinite dignity and worthiness, that he might be capable of meriting infinite blessings. *The Son of God is a fit person on this account.* It was necessary that He should be a person of infinite power and wisdom, for this work is so difficult that it requires such a one. *Christ is a fit person also upon this account.*

It was requisite that he should be a person infinitely dear to God the Father in order to give an infinite value to his transactions in the Father’s esteem, and that the Father’s love to him might balance the offence and provocation by our sins. *Christ is a fit person upon this account.* Therefore called “the beloved” (Eph 1:6), He hath made us accepted *in* the Beloved.

It was requisite that the person should be one that could act in this as of his own absolute right: one that in himself is not a servant or subject because if he is one that cannot act of his own right, he cannot merit anything. He that is a servant and that can do no more than he is bound to do cannot merit. And he that has nothing that is absolutely his own cannot pay any price to redeem another. Upon this account, *Christ is a fit person*, and none but a divine person can be fit. He must be a person of infinite mercy and love, for no other person but such a one would undertake a work so difficult for a creature so unworthy as man. Upon this account also, *Christ is a fit person.*

It was requisite that he should be a person of unchangeable perfect truth and faithfulness. Otherwise, he would not be fit to be depended on by us in so great an affair. *Christ is also a fit person upon this account.*

⁸⁶ **contrivance** – plan.

⁸⁷ **pitched upon** – determined.

⁸⁸ **requisite** – required by the nature of things.

The wisdom of God in choosing His eternal Son appears, not only in that He is a fit person, but also in that He was the *only* fit Person of all persons, whether created or uncreated. No created person—neither man, nor angel—was fit for this undertaking...It shows a divine wisdom to know that He was a fit person. No other but one of divine wisdom could have known it. None but one of infinite wisdom could have thought of Him to be a redeemer of sinners. For He, as He is God, is one of the Persons offended by sin against Whom man by his sin had rebelled. Who but God infinitely wise could ever have thought of Him to be a redeemer of sinners *against* Whom they had sinned, *to* Whom they were enemies, and *of* Whom they deserved infinitely ill? Who would ever have thought of Him as one that should set his heart upon man and exercise infinite love and pity to him and exhibit infinite wisdom, power, and merit in redeeming him? We proceed,

2. TO CONSIDER THE SUBSTITUTING OF THIS PERSON IN OUR ROOM. After choosing the Person to be our Redeemer, the next step of divine wisdom is to contrive the way that He should perform this work. If God had declared who the person was that should do this work and had gone no further, no creature could have thought which way this person could have performed the work. If God had told them that His *own Son* must be the Redeemer; that He *alone* was a fit Person for the work; and that He was a Person every way fit and sufficient for it—but had proposed to them to contrive a way how this fit and sufficient Person should proceed—we may well suppose that all created understandings would have been utterly at a loss.

The first thing necessary to be done is that this Son of God should become our Representative and Surety and so be substituted in the sinner's room. But who of created intelligences would have thought of any such thing as the eternal and infinitely beloved Son of God being substituted in the room of sinners? His standing in [the] stead of a sinner, a rebel, an object of the wrath of God? Who would have thought of a person of infinite glory representing sinful worms that had made themselves by sin infinitely provoking and abominable? For if the Son of God be substituted in the sinner's room, then his sin must be charged upon *Him*. He will thereby take the guilt of the sinner upon Himself. He must be subject to the same Law that man was, both as to the commands and threatening: but who would have thought of any such thing concerning the Son of God? But we proceed,

3. TO CONSIDER THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST. The next step of divine wisdom in contriving how Christ should perform the work of redeeming sinners was in determining His Incarnation. Suppose God had revealed His counsels thus far to created understandings that His own Son was the person chosen for this work, that He had substituted Him in the sinner's room and appointed Him to take the sinner's obligations and guilt on Himself—and had revealed no more, but had left the rest to them to find out. It is no way probable that even then they could ever have thought of a way whereby this Person might actually have performed the work of redemption. For if the Son of God be substituted in the sinner's stead, then He takes the sinner's obligations on Himself. For instance, He must take the obligation the sinner is under to perform perfect obedience to the divine Law. But it is not probable that any creature could have conceived how that could be possible. How should a Person Who is the eternal Jehovah become a servant, be under Law, and perform obedience even to the law of man?

Again, if the Son of God be substituted in the sinner's stead, then He comes under the sinner's obligation to suffer the punishment that man's sin had deserved. Who could have thought that to be possible? For how should a divine Person, Who is essentially, unchangeably, and infinitely happy, suffer pain and torment? How should He, Who is the object of God's infinitely dear love, suffer the wrath of His Father? It is not to be supposed that created wisdom ever would have found out a way to get over these difficulties. But divine wisdom hath found out a way, [namely], by the Incarnation of the Son of God. That the Word should be made flesh, that He might be both God and man in one Person: what created understanding could have conceived that such a thing was possible?...

And if God had revealed to them that it *was* possible and even that it should be, but left them to find out *how* it should be, we may well suppose that they would all have been puzzled and confounded to conceive of a way for so uniting a man to the eternal Son of God that they should be but one Person, that One Who is truly a man in all respects should indeed be the very same Son of God that was with God from all eternity. This is a great mystery to us. Hereby, a person that is infinite, omnipotent, and unchangeable is become, in a sense, a finite, a feeble man, a man subject to our sinless infirmities, passions, and calamities! The great God, the *sovereign* of heaven and earth, is thus become a worm of the dust. "But I am a worm, and no man" (Psa 22:6). He that is eternal and self-existent is by this union born of a woman! He Who is the great original Spirit is clothed with flesh and blood like one of us! He Who is independent, self-sufficient, and all-sufficient now is come to stand in need of food and clothing. He becomes poor [and] "hath not where to lay his head" (Mat 8:20), stands in need of the charity of men, and is

maintained by it! It is far above us to conceive how it is done! It is a great wonder and mystery to us, but it was no mystery to divine wisdom.

4. THE NEXT THING TO BE CONSIDERED IS THE LIFE OF CHRIST IN THIS WORLD. The wisdom of God appears in the circumstances of His life and in the work and business of His life.

(1) The circumstances of His life. If God had revealed that His own Son should be incarnate and should live in this world in the human nature, and it had been left to men to determine what circumstances of life would have been most suitable for Him, human wisdom would have determined that He should appear in the world in a most magnificent manner with very extraordinary outward ensigns⁸⁹ of honor, authority, and power far above any of the kings of the earth; that here He should reign in great visible pomp and splendor over all nations. Thus, it was that men's wisdom did determine before Christ came. The wise, the great men among the Jews, scribes and Pharisees, who are called "Princes of this world" (1Co 2:6-8), did expect that the Messiah would thus appear. But the wisdom of God chose quite otherwise. It chose that when the Son of God became man, He should begin His life in a stable; for many years dwell obscurely in a family of low degree in the world; and be in low outward circumstances: that He should be poor and not have where to lay His head; that he should be maintained by the charity of some of His disciples; that He should "grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa 53:2); that He should not "cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (Isa 42:2); that He should come to Zion in a lowly manner "riding on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass" (Zec 9:9; Mat 21:5); that He should be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3).

And now [that] the divine determination in this matter is made known, we may safely conclude that it is far the most suitable and that it would not have been at all suitable for God, when He was manifest in flesh, to appear with earthly pomp, wealth, and grandeur. No! These things are infinitely too mean⁹⁰ and despicable for the Son of God to show as if He affected⁹¹ or esteemed them. Men, if they had this way proposed to them, would have been ready to condemn it as foolish and very unsuitable for the Son of God. But "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1Co 1:25). God hath brought to nought the wisdom of this world and the princes of this world (1Co 2:6). Christ, by thus appearing in mean and low outward circumstances in the world, has poured contempt upon all worldly wealth and glory and has taught us to despise it. If it becomes mean men to despise them, how much more did it become the Son of God! Christ hereby hath taught us to be lowly in heart. If He Who was infinitely high and great was thus lowly, how lowly should we be who are indeed so vile!

(2) The wisdom of God appears in the work and business of the life of Christ. Particularly, that He should perfectly obey the Law of God under such great temptations: that He should have conflicts with and overcome for us in a way of obedience the powers of earth and hell; that He should be subject to, not only the Moral Law, but the ceremonial also, that heavy yoke of bondage. Christ went through the time of His public ministry in delivering to us divine instructions and doctrines. The wisdom of God appears in giving us such a One to be our Prophet and Teacher Who is a divine Person: Who is Himself the very wisdom and Word of God and was from all eternity in the bosom of the Father. His word is of greater authority and weight than if delivered by the mouth of an ordinary prophet. And how wisely ordered that the same should be our Teacher and Redeemer in order that His relations and offices as Redeemer might the more sweeten and endear His instructions to us. We are ready to give heed to what is said by those who are dear to us. Our love to their persons makes us to delight in their discourse. It is therefore wisely ordered that He Who has done so much to endear Himself to us should be appointed our great Prophet to deliver to us divine doctrines.

5. THE NEXT THING TO BE CONSIDERED IS THE DEATH OF CHRIST. This is a means of salvation for poor sinners that no other but divine wisdom would have pitched upon. When revealed, it was doubtless greatly to the surprise of all the hosts of heaven; and they never will cease to wonder at it. How astonishing is it that a Person Who is blessed forever and is infinitely and essentially happy should endure the greatest sufferings that ever were endured on earth! That a Person Who is the Supreme Lord and Judge of the world should be arraigned⁹² and should stand at the judgment seat of mortal worms, and then be condemned! That a Person Who is the living God and the fountain of life should be put to death! That a Person Who created the world and gives life to all His creatures

⁸⁹ **ensigns** – signs; tokens.

⁹⁰ **mean** – inferior.

⁹¹ **affected** – sought after; desired.

⁹² **arraigned** – called before a court to answer charges made against Him.

should be put to death *by His own creatures!* That a Person of infinite majesty and glory—and so the object of the love, praises, and adorations of angels—should be mocked and spit upon by the vilest of men. That a Person, infinitely good and Who is love itself, should suffer the greatest cruelty. That a Person Who is infinitely beloved of the Father should be put to inexpressible anguish under His own Father’s wrath. That He Who is King of heaven, Who hath heaven for His throne and the earth for His footstool, should be buried in the prison of the grave. How wonderful⁹³ is this! Yet this is the way that God’s wisdom hath fixed upon as the way of sinners’ salvation, as neither unsuitable nor dishonorable to Christ.

6. THE LAST THING DONE TO PROCURE SALVATION FOR SINNERS IS CHRIST’S EXALTATION. Divine wisdom saw it needful, or most expedient,⁹⁴ that the same Person Who died upon the cross should sit at His right hand, on His own throne, as supreme Governor of the world, and should have particularly the absolute disposal of all things relating to man’s salvation, and should be the Judge of the world. This was needful because it was requisite that the same Person Who purchased salvation should have the bestowing of it. For it is not fit that God should at all transact with the fallen creature in a way of mercy but by a mediator. This is exceedingly for the strengthening of the faith and comfort of the saints: that He Who hath endured so much to purchase salvation for them has all things in heaven and in earth delivered unto Him; that He might bestow eternal life on them for whom He purchased it; and that the same person that loved them so greatly as to shed His precious blood for them was to be their final Judge.

This then was another thing full of wonders: that He Who was man as well as God, [that] He Who was a servant and died like a malefactor⁹⁵ should be made the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, angels, and men; the absolute Disposer of eternal life and death; the supreme Judge of all created intelligent beings for eternity; and should have committed to Him all the governing power of God the Father, and that not only as God, but as *God-man*, not exclusive of the human nature.

As it is wonderful that a Person Who is truly divine should be humbled so as to become a servant and to suffer as a malefactor; so it is in like manner wonderful that He Who is God-man, not exclusive of the manhood, should be exalted to the power and honor of the great God of heaven and earth. But such wonders as these has infinite wisdom contrived and accomplished in order to our salvation.

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Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational preacher; regarded as America’s greatest evangelical theologian and well-known for his preaching in the Great Awakening; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony.



⁹³ **wonderful** – full of astonishment.

⁹⁴ **expedient** – appropriate to the purpose.

⁹⁵ **malefactor** – criminal.