

Christ Our Penal Substitute

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Table of Contents:

- 1. The Rationalistic Objections to Penal Substitute
- 2. Definitions and Statement of the Issue
- 3. Objections Examine
- 4. The Utilitarian Theory of Punishments
- 5. Retribution not Revenge
- 6. The Witness of Human Consciousness and Experience
- 7. Our Opponents' Self Contradiction
- 8. The Ethical Objections Considered
- 9. What Scripture says of Substitution
- 10. The Testimony of Christendom
- 11. Conclusion

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Reviewing now the course of this discussion, we gather the following results: The scriptural objections against the fundamental Christian concept were found to be entirely invalid and irrelevant. We found this concept justified by the common sense and practical judgment of all men, and all ages, including our own, in their social relations, and still applied, in some cases, by the jurisprudence of the most modern Christian nations. We found the true reason of the limited application of these concepts by human magistrates, not in the essential injustice of the principle, but rather in the fact that men, under ordinary civil jurisdiction, cannot fulfill the conditions necessary for their proper application. We found God claiming for himself the just right to punish imputed guilt under certain conditions, and we perceive in his providence frequent instances of such judgments. We examined the philosophic cavil against this concept of substitution whence our opponents claim a necessary intuition against it, and we found their claim groundless, their postulate irrelevant, and their philosophy to be the false and degrading theory of the utilitarian ethics. We traced their sophism to its proximate source in a quite heedless and superficial neglect of the distinction between sinfulness and guilt; a distinction so plain that the most common minds act upon it in their own secular moral judgments. We showed that the Scriptures, claiming divine inspiration, beyond all honest question, mean to teach penal substitution

and imputation; and that their denial necessitates the rejection of the most cardinal propositions clearly taught in these Scriptures. So that dissentients have no option except avowed infidelity or acquiescence in our doctrine. We arrayed the consensus of Christendom, showing that not only the popish and Greek communions, but all the Protestant, with one small exception, with all their best learning and logic, hold to our proposition as a necessary, constituent part of their common system of doctrine.

This, then, is our conclusion concerning the bitter death of the holy Messiah as given in the inspired words of Isaiah liii. 5, 6: "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." Is this an astonishing doctrine? Is the conception above the range of human imagination. So let it be. It may be that only the divine wisdom was adequate to excogitate it, and only the infinite divine love was capable of applying it for the salvation of enemies. We thank God that it is not a deduction or invention of man's philosophy, but a revelation from omniscience. But after God has authorized us to think this thought, we find in it nothing but supreme reason, justice, holiness, and benignity. These high revelations of the necessity of satisfaction for sin, grounded in the immutability of God's distributive justice, complete, and exalt our conception of him and his government. When we discard the ethics of expediency, place the disciplinary results of chastisement in their subordinate rank amidst God's purposes, and when we recognize the truth that his supreme end in punishing is the impartial satisfaction of eternal justice, all reasonable difficulties concerning the transfer of guilt and penalty, the proper conditions being present, vanish away. Towards guilty but pardoned men God does pursue in the infliction of pains a remedial and disciplinary purpose; but when he comes to deal in justice with men and angels who are finally reprobate, these ends are absent; the only one which remains is the retributive one. To secure this end, the punishment of a substitute may be as truly relevant as of the guilty principal, provided the adequate substitute be found, and his own free consent obviates all charge of injustice against him personally; for now law is satisfied, guilt is duly punished, though the guilty man be pardoned. The penal debt is paid, as truly and fairly paid as is the bond of the insolvent debtor when his independent surety brings to the creditor the full tale of money. But let us suppose that the wisdom and power of God the Father and the infinite majesty and love of the Son combine to effect a substitution by which impartial justice and law are more gloriously satisfied than by the condign punishment of the guilty themselves. Then is a result obtained unspeakably more honorable, not only to justice, but to the divine love and every other attribute. God is revealed full-orbed in his righteousness, no longer wrenched out of true moral symmetry by man's poor utilitarian ethics. Impartial justice appears even more adorable than in the punishment of the personally guilty. When God pours out his retributive justice upon the guilt of men and angels who have insulted him, caviling creatures, in

their blindness and enmity, might charge that he was indulging, at least in part, a personal resentment inflamed by their outrages; but when they see him visit this justice upon his only begotten Son, infinitely holy in his eyes, notwithstanding his eternal and divine love, men and devils are obliged to admit that this is the action of nothing but pure, impersonal equity, as absolutely free from the taint of malice as it is majestic and awful. When we see that while, on the one hand, immutable righteousness restrains the Father from setting aside his penal law at the prompting of mere pity, infinite love makes him incapable of consenting to the deserved perdition of sinners, and makes him willing to sacrifice the object worthier and dearer in his eyes than all the worlds rather than endure the spectacle of this immense woe; we gain a revelation of God's love more glorious and tender than any other doctrine can teach. Our opponents charge that we obscure the delightful attribute of benevolence in God in order to exaggerate the awful attribute of vengeance. In truth we do just the opposite. It is our doctrine as taught by the gospel, which reveals depths and heights of the divine tenderness and love, which neither men nor angels could have otherwise imagined. The Socinian says that God's love is such an attribute as prompts him to forgive sin at the expense at once of the order of his great kingdom and of the glory of his own consistency. A very deep pity this! but a pity equally weak and unwise. The gospel teaches us that there is in God a pity infinitely deep, and equally wise and holy.

Let us suppose a human brother most gracious and virtuous who should speak thus; "I cannot sacrifice principle and honor to save my erring younger brother; but I am willing to sacrifice myself. I cannot lie to save him, but I will die to save him." This declaration would excite in every just mind glowing admiration. Such an elder brother would be a feeble type, in his combined integrity and pitying love, of the God-man; and he answers us that in these exalted affections he represents exactly the attributes of the whole Trinity.

God's permission of evil among his creatures has ever been the insoluble mystery of theology, as it has ever been the grand topic of infidel cavils. Here has been through all the centuries the chief battle-ground of the Christian apologists against atheists and agnostics. It is from the apparent impossibility of reconciling God's voluntary permission of evil with his own attributes that all systems of dualism, such as those of Magians and Manicheans, have taken their pretext. If the Christian pleads that whenever a rational creature abuses his free agency by turning to sin, natural evil or misery must follow by an inevitable law of sequence as much natural as it is judicial, and that therefore it is the willfully erring creature, and not God, who is responsible for all the misery in the universe. Infidels are not satisfied. They rejoin: then if your God is omniscient he foreknew all the wretched results of this law; if he recognized it as a necessary natural law grounded in the very nature of free agents, and not proceeding primarily from his own retributive purpose and sentence, then he must have foreseen that it was necessary to protect his universe from moral evil or sin in order to save it from natural evil or

misery, the unavoidable sequel of sin. Now, if he is what the Christians describe, he must have created all his rational creatures in moral purity and innocence. Why did he not take the pains to keep them all innocent, and thus to save them from the misery? They say that he is an absolute sovereign, that he is omniscient, that he is omnipotent, and that he is also infinitely benevolent. If he has all these attributes, then he was able effectually to keep all his rational creatures holy; if he is infinitely benevolent, he must have felt a controlling motive to do so. It was vain for a Bledsoe, they argue, to attempt the evasion of this deadly point by saying, that the will of a moral free agent cannot be effectually controlled from without consistently with his free agency; for this is precisely what the Christian has no right to say. He teaches that it is proper for men to pray to God to regenerate and sanctify their sinful fellow-men. If prayer is answered, God is doing this very thing, controlling their sinful free agency from without. Again, the Christian says that there is an everlasting heaven, inhabited by elect angels and men, who are to remain forever holy and happy. Since these are still finite, the certain perpetuity of holy choice in them must be the effect of God's grace. It must be true, then, that he who is able to keep a Gabriel or a human saint forever holy in heaven, and who is able to convert a wicked Saul of Tarsus, could also have preserved a Satan and an Adam from apostasy without injuring their free-agency. Or if a Leibnitz offers us his ingenious optimism as a solution, teaching that God chose this present universe, notwithstanding the sin and misery which are in it, as, on the whole, the best possible universe; the assailants remain unsatisfied. They rejoin, that if God is absolutely sovereign, omniscient, and omnipotent, he is able to construct a universe containing everything that is holy and good in the actual universe, without any of the evils; so that this mixed universe is not the best possible one for him. And here the argument pauses, leaving the mystery of God's permission of evil, palliated indeed by our collateral arguments, but still unsolved.

The triumphant refutation of the caviler is our doctrine of redemption through Christ's substitution, and nowhere else. These are the essential points of our defense of God's providence: First, The restoration of Adam's apostate race was in no sense necessary to God's personal interest, glory, or selfish welfare. He is all-sufficient unto himself. He was infinitely blessed and happy in himself before Adam's race existed. When it fell, he could have vindicated his own glory, as he did in the case of Satan and his angels, by the condign punishment of all men. He could have created another world and another race, fairer than ours, to fill the chasm made by our fall. Second, The price which he paid in order to avoid this just result of sin in our fallen race was the death of the God-man. Since the co-equal Son was incarnate in him, he was a person dearer and greater in God's eyes than any world, or all the worlds together. Being infinite, God-Messiah bulks more largely in the dimensions of his being than all the creatures aggregated. He was more worthy and lovely in the Father's view than any holy creature, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This great fact may not open to us the deep secret of the permission of

evil -- perhaps no finite mind could fully comprehend it were its revelation attempted -- but the glorious sacrifice of love does prove that no defect of divine benevolence can have had part in this secret. Had there been in God's heart the least lack of infinite mercy, had there been a single fibre of indifference to the misery of his creatures, Christ would never have been given to die for the guilt of men. The Messiah is our complete theodicy! But he cannot be such to the Socinian or the Arian, who denies his infinite Godhead, nor to any who deny his righteous vicarious substitution. In a word, God's moral government, in its ultimate conclusion, must be as absolute and perfect as his own nature; for, being supreme and almighty, he is irresponsible save to his own perfections. Therefore, if he is a being of infinite perfections, his government must be one of righteous final results. It will be an exact representation of himself, for he makes it just what he pleases. If there is moral defect in the final adjustment, it can only be accounted for by defect in God. It must be an absolute result, because the free act of an infinite being. The God whom we adore, to whom we peacefully entrust our everlasting all, "is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

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