

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 Examined
- 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

Chapter 9

What Scripture says of Substitution

Much of our argument has been run into the field of rational discussion, because our opponents are rationalists, and they, by their attacks on God's truth, have made it necessary to follow them to their own ground. But the reader must not infer from this that we think that human philosophy is the superior, and Scripture the inferior source of evidence. Our comparative view of the sources of authority -- a view taught by a long acquaintance with the contradictions, mutations, and vagaries of the most boastful human philosophies -- may be truly expressed in the apostle's words: "Let God be true, but every man a liar." What saith the Scripture? When that is carefully and honestly ascertained, it should be the end of controversy. Therefore, the main thing which we have to allege in support of our thesis is this: that the doctrine of Christ's substitution under our penal obligations, and the imputation of his satisfaction for guilt to be the ground of our justification, is, either implicitly or expressly, taught throughout the Scriptures. It is so intertwined as an essential part of the whole warp and woof of the fabric that it can only be gotten out of it by tearing it into shreds. This we shall now evince; First, By a brief array of the scriptural assertions of substitution; and, Second, By showing how many other heads of doctrine which are cardinal in the Bible system are vitiated or impugned when that doctrine is rejected. Decisive proof-texts are so numerous that all cannot be recited; all that can be here done is to

classify the several groups of texts, giving sufficient examples under each group to show how they apply. This is also thoroughly trodden ground in Christian theology. All of its great teachers discuss the doctrine with sufficiency, and several of them with triumphant and exhaustive demonstration. Among these we will commend a purely biblical discussion, now too much out of fashion, Magee on The Atonement. He who will follow the Scripture citations and searching criticisms and expositions of this old book will be compelled to say that the doctrine of Christ's penal substitution, whether reasonable or not, is certainly taught in "Holy Writ."

We find our first argument in the meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices. These were first instituted by God in the family of Adam, before the gate of the lost Eden. They were continued by God's authority under every dispensation until the resurrection of Christ. Moses gave perfect regularity and definiteness to the ordinances of bloody sacrifice in the Pentateuch, which he did by divine appointment. Ancient believers knew that "the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin" by any virtue of its own. What, then, did the sacrifices mean? They were emblems and types, teaching to men's bodily senses this great theological truth, that "without shedding of blood is no remission," and its consequence, that remission is provided for through a substitute of divine appointment; for fallen man is "a prisoner of hope," not of despair. Next, the antitype to this ever-repeated emblem is Jesus. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John i. 29; 1 Cor. xv. 3; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. viii. 3; ix. 11 -- 14.) Now let us add the indisputable fact that these bloody sacrifices were intended by God to symbolize the substitution of an innocent victim in place of the guilty offerer; the transfer of his guilt to the substitute; satisfaction for it by the vicarious death, and the consequent forgiveness of the sinner. (Lev. i. 4; xiv. 21; xvii. 11, *et passim*.) The very actions of the worshipper and the priest bespoke these truths as strongly as the words. The guilty worshipper laid his hands upon the head of the victim while he confessed his trespasses. Thereupon the knife of the priest descended upon its throat, the life-blood was sprinkled upon the altar and upon the body of the worshipper, and the most vital parts of the animal -- representing its living body in those cases where it was not a holocaust -- were committed to the pure flames, pungent emblem of divine justice. Now, when the types so clearly signified substitution and imputation, how can the great antitype mean less? Can it be possible that the shadow had more solidity than the substantial body which cast it before?

But the great truth is expressly taught in Scripture, in the following various forms and in many places, of which we cite only a few: Christ died "For us," "for the ungodly." (Rom. v. 6, 8; 1 Peter iii. 18, *hyper adikon*), and for our sins. Socinians say, "True, he died, in a general sense, for us, inasmuch as his death is a part of the agency for our rescue; he did die to do us good, not for himself only." The answer is, that in nearly every case the context proves it a vicarious dying for our guilt. Romans v. 9: "We are justified by his blood." 1 Peter iii. 18: "The just for the

unjust." Then, also, he is said to be antilutron for many. This preposition (anti) properly signifies substitution, see Matt. xxvi. 28, for instance. "Himself bore our sins;" "He bare the sins of many," and other equivalent expressions are applied to him. (1 Pet. ii. 24; Heb. ix. 28; Isa. liii. 6.) The verb used by Peter is bastadzein, whose idiomatic meaning is to bear or carry upon one's person. And these words are abundantly defined in our sense by Old Testament usage. (Compare Num. ix. 13.) An evasion is again attempted by pointing to Matthew viii. 17, and saying that there this bearing of man's sorrows was not an enduring of them in his person, but a bearing of them away, a removal of them. We reply that the evangelist refers to Isaiah liii. 4, not to liii. 6. And Peter says: "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree." The language is unique.

Another unmistakable class of texts is those in which he is said to be made sin for us, while we are made righteous in him. (See 1 Cor. i. 30; 2 Cor. v. 21.) A still more indisputable place is where he is said to be made a curse for us. (Gal. iii. 13.) The orthodox meaning, considering the context, is unavoidable.

Again, he is said in many places to be our Redeemer, i. e., Ransomer, and his death, or his blood, is our ransom (antilutron). (Matt. xx. 28; 1 Peter i. 19; 1 Tim. ii. 6; 1 Cor. vi. 20.) It is vain to reply that God is said to redeem his people in many places, when the only meaning is that he delivers them; and that Moses is called the redeemer of Israel out of Egypt, who certainly did not do this by a vicarious penalty. In these cases, either the word employed or the context proves that the deliverance was only a metaphysical redemption, not like Christ's, a ransoming by actual price paid. Christ's death is a proper ransom, because the very price is mentioned. In Bible times the person ransomed was either a criminal or a military captive, by the rules of ancient war legally bound to slavery. The ransom price was a sum of money or other valuables, paid to the master in satisfaction for his claim of service from the captive. This is the sense in which Christ's righteousness is our ransom.

It has been shown in a previous chapter at what deadly price our opponents seek to escape the patent argument, that if Christ did not suffer for imputed guilt, since he was himself perfectly righteous, he must have been punished for no guilt at all. But this argument should be carried further. Even if we granted that the natural ills of life and bodily death are not necessarily penal, but come to all alike in the course of events, the peculiar features of Christ's death would be unexplained. He suffers what no other good man sharing the regular course of nature ever experienced, the spiritual miseries of Divine desertion, of Satanic buffetings, let loose against him, and of all the horrors of apprehended wrath which could be felt without personal remorse. (Luke xxii. 53; Matt. xxvi. 38, and xxvii. 46.) See how manfully Christ approaches his martyrdom, and how sadly he sinks under it when it comes. Had he borne nothing more than natural evil, he would have been inferior to the merely human heroes; and instead of recognizing the exclamation of Rousseau as just, "Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus

Christ as a God," we must give the palm of superior fortitude to the Grecian sage. Christ's crushing agonies must be accounted for by his bearing the wrath of God for the sins of the world.

The second head of our biblical argument is inferential in structure, yet scarcely weaker. When once Christ's proper substitution is denied, consistency forces men to pervert or deny most of the other doctrines which are characteristic of the gospel. Since these doctrines are also categorically taught in Scripture, that proposition must be false which necessitates their perversion. First, then, our assailants attack the divine essence by seeking to expunge one of God's immutable attributes, distributive justice. They have to tamper with all those Scriptures, whether literal or figurative, which ascribe that attribute unequivocally to God; and before they have gotten all of these texts out of the way, they have to employ methods of exposition so unfaithful and licentious as to leave Scripture practically worthless as a rule of faith. They give us a God of expediency, instead of a God of righteous and eternal principles. They either have to deny God's providence towards his holy son Jesus, or else to represent him as exercising that providence in a way which leaves him an object of mistrust and terror rather than of reverence and faith. They must wrest the true account of God's penal administration in this world and the next, so as to leave it incompatible with his omniscience and omnipotence, and even with that benevolence which they would make his sole essential attribute.

Their doctrine concerning justice and punishment constrains them, if they are consistent, to reject the whole history of Scripture concerning Satan and his angels. Indeed, the most of them avowedly do this. The Bible says most explicitly, that Satan and his angels are condemned for the guilt of rebellion, falsehood, malice, and soul-murder, and that they are to be punished forever. Plainly, men must either give up the theory that God's holiness in punishing can only be defended by representing his penalties as only a benevolent remedial expediency, or they must get rid of this whole history. Some do so by declaring it fabulous, which of course assails the veracity of prophets and apostles, and of Christ; others, by representing all mentions of Satan and demons as mere impersonations of mischievous principles, a scheme of interpretation which may equally as well resolve the whole Scripture history into allegory.

Of course, the everlasting punishment of reprobate men must also be discarded. We must all be universalists. For, however guilty the criminals, there can be no everlasting punishments which are manifestly not remedial, but only kill with the second death, and are not intended or expected to reform the sufferers, since they are to remain forever reprobate and grow worse and worse. Everlasting punishments cannot be explained as simply deterrent, because after the economy of redemption shall be closed at the judgment day, and all pardoned men and holy angels shall have entered into the "marriage supper of the Lamb," and shall be eternally guarded against evil example and temptation by the

encircling walls of heaven, there will be nobody to deter. That is to say, nobody but the reprobate themselves, and they will not be deterred from continued rebellion by their own sufferings, or by the example of their fellows' miseries. But if God know this perfectly well, he cannot be charged with the policy of inflicting so much wretchedness for an object which he foresees to be futile.

The doctrine of original sin must be cast overboard. We must all become Pelagians also. For if the imputation of believers' guilt to Christ is an ethical absurdity, the imputation of Adam's guilt to our race must be worse, inasmuch as the consent of the race to this arrangement was not first obtained. Then we are left without any explanation why little children suffer the temporal penalties of sin before they are capable of intentional transgression and personal responsibility. All of that tremendous and tragical question is left without solution, to torture the hearts of sympathizing and bereaved parents. Have these precious little ones no providence over them, and do they suffer and die under the remorseless grind of a physical machine, as cruel as it is unknowing, which these people call "nature"? And while we stand watching their infant agonies, conscious of our impotence to stay the omnipotent machine, must we believe that there is no heavenly Father who concerns himself with their sufferings? Or must we believe that he punishes where he sees no guilt? If there is no imputation, there can be no federal theology, no representative covenant of works or covenant of grace. The awful question, how birth-sin comes to infest the race of man, is left without any possible solution.

The cardinal doctrine of justification must be corrupted in a similar manner. None assert more clearly than our opponents, that if the imputation of our sins to Christ be absurd, then the imputation of his righteousness to us must be equally so. Thus the inquirer, having lost all claim to the righteousness of Christ as the meritorious ground of this pardon and acceptance, must seek an answer to the question, On what ground am I justified? For the sake of what am I to receive this precious title to immunity and reward, which I myself do not deserve, if it cannot be for the sake of an imputed righteousness? Is this act of grace on God's part a moral act at all? Would not this receive the negative if God's act has no moral ground? Then something must be sought for, possessing moral quality, which the believer does for himself. What is it? Pelagians and Socinians answer that the ground of both pardon and adoption is the merit of the Christian's own penitence, new obedience, and reformed life. Those who are not willing so flatly to contradict Scripture tell us that it is the believer's faith; that this being a moral act of the soul is graciously taken as a substituted righteousness for the life of obedience which he has not rendered. So he is justified not only by his faith, but on account of his faith. On either plan the true justification of the gospel is lost.

The doctrine of indwelling sin and sanctification must also be perverted in order to bring them into line with the new doctrine. Combine these positions Christ's righteousness is indeed perfect, but cannot be imputed to us. God's law is perfect

and requires a perfect obedience from us; otherwise our defects would still condemn us. But is the obedience of the most penitent and reformed Christian actually perfect? Must not perfection exclude even those defects and slips in duty which the best men in the world confess in themselves? Then the definition of perfection must be lowered. A perfect God and a perfect law call for a perfect life. Then the Pelagian dogma must be adopted, that the life which is prevalently right is perfectly right, that righteousness and sin consist only in right or wrong acts of will, and that the believer who has unquestionable sincerity of purpose is, under this gospel law, the perfect man. Thus the remains of indwelling sin and concupiscence must be pronounced not peccatum verum, but only fomes peccati, incurring no real guilt. Thus is the purity of God's law degraded, and a debased standard of obedience set up, which always leads to an actual life still more debased than itself. Such is the havoc which is wrought in the whole system of belief of the man who has rejected Christ's substitution, if he thinks consistently. The instructive fact is, that this error actually has led to all these perversions of doctrine in the creeds of sects which assert it.

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