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**PRESENTS**

## The Nature of God In The Cross of Christ:

The Holy Love and Wrath of God

God set forth [Christ Jesus] as a propitiation by His blood,  
through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because  
in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,  
to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness,  
that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.  
(Rom. 3:25-26)

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die;  
yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.  
But God demonstrates His own love toward us,  
in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.  
(Rom 5:7-8)

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# Introduction

Across the world's cultures, religions, and peoples, exists a large diversity of philosophies offered to explain various facets of life and eternity. What has been evolving throughout the course of history and adopted today by the majority of the world is the agnostic tendency to "throw in the towel" and affirm that **if** there is any truth at all, we certainly do not know it. In the U.S. alone, there is an ever increasing number who are embracing what seems to be the only dogma left in the modern age, relativism. The "New Age" adherents cry out absolutely against the absolute claims of Christianity, saying, "We can know nothing absolutely." And, although in doing this they are disproving the very principle they wish to forward, the message is clear: man has continually affirmed what God has long ago declared, that man refuses to acknowledge the One, True Triune God of the Universe.

As Ligonier Ministry's R. C. Sproul has pointed out, many go so far as to say that it is all right to believe anything, so long as it is sincerely believed<sup>1</sup>. As if God could have been any clearer when he declared, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:3). Have we forgotten to whom we direct our faith, worship and lives? The scriptures have always been clear on this issue. From the times when Aaron led the people into false (but "sincere") worship of the golden calf to the pantheists of Paul's day, God himself declares that worship or devotion directed toward anything or anyone other than himself is plain idolatry (no matter how sincere it might appear to be). Worship to an "unknown God" is heinous and must be rejected as it is rejected by God himself (Acts 17:22-31)

The idolatry of the world, then, is nothing new. It has been present from the first sin in the garden, and in many forms this idolatry is blatant and obvious. However, it is the less obvious occurrences which should be alarming to today's evangelical church. For, it is in the formation of flawed theologies and doctrines, that believers themselves often exchange for a lie, the true identity of the only God we are to know. The doctrine of the cross of Christ is one such area that has been developed by many, independent of theology proper<sup>2</sup>. Because the cross is at the very center of the Christian faith, though, all understanding of the atonement surely must begin with and reflect the true nature and attributes of God Almighty. God's Word is firstly focused on Himself. His Word clearly develops absolute, fundamental, and unequivocal truths concerning the work of Christ and Himself; and, each of

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<sup>1</sup> Sproul, R.C. "Introduction."

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge defines theology proper as the biblical teaching of "the being and attributes of God... [and] the relation of God to the world..." Both Sproul, Hodge, and others affirm its primacy in the study of theology.

these truths accurately and clearly reflects and displays the glory of God, who is to be KNOWN correctly and personally by his people.

## The Necessity of the Cross

As Arthur Pink has noted, the presentation of the cross typically includes a discussion of the “necessity” of the cross; yet, the term “necessity” is frequently introduced without “careful definition and explanation” and can lead to “God-dishonoring views<sup>3</sup>.” But since there is a sense in which the cross was necessary, let us try to qualify this with two main points.

Firstly, we have to realize that God did not have to save man. God freely chose to do this, according to his own wisdom and purposes<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, given that God freely chose to provide salvation, the means is not necessarily limited to the Son of God dying a shameful and pitiful death on the cross. Surely, our finite minds might be unable to think of alternate ways of salvation, but as Pink has it, “to say that the all-wise God Himself could find no other way of saving sinners, consistently with His holiness and justice, than the one He has [the means of the cross], is highly presumptuous<sup>5</sup>.” God, surely does not live in box which has been constructed by man, for he is entirely free of external constraints. However, the reader will notice that Pink leaves room, in fact stresses throughout the rest of his work, that the way of saving sinners must be consistent with “His holiness and justice.” As we shall see, this - that God all of his actions must satisfy his own attributes and being, whether it be his immutability, his holiness, or any other attribute - is the only real “necessity” of the cross. If “necessity” is viewed any other way, it can surely be a misleading term.

Finally, although some have argued that God must satisfy his law in all that he does, we must take care to not over-emphasize this point. For one thing, it is true that God, having revealed his law, is subject to it also<sup>6</sup>. But this point can easily be over-argued such that the limitation of the law becomes a constraint almost external to God himself. When this happens, the law can easily become something under which God must uncontrollable submit. However, God’s law is only the natural codification of His very being and therefore should not be viewed extrinsically or independently from his Person. Beyond, through, and in the law, then, we must see clearly the perfect nature of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Pink, p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 8:28, 9:15, 17, 18, 16:27; 1 Cor. 1:24-25, 2:7; Eph. 1:4-5, 8, 9-11, 3:8-11; 2 Tim. 1:9.

<sup>5</sup> Pink, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, Christ was made under the law (Gal. 4:4) so that he could fulfill it (Matt. 5:17) and redeem his own (Gal. 4:5).

# Theology Proper

## In The Old and New Testaments

Perhaps one of the most pervasive uniformed views of the Old and New Testament which leads to a misunderstanding of the cross is that which poses the Old Testament (OT) God against the New Testament (NT) God. It has frequently been said that the God of the OT is a God of “fire and brimstone,” while that of the NT is a “loving” God. However, such a theology either implies polytheism or calls into question the very immutability of God, which is axiomatically the foundation of our faith and trust in Him. Furthermore, if we see the will of God in this errant perspective, the NT reader will have a tendency to drive a wedge within the persons of the trinity. The fact is, God has always been a loving God, even in the OT; and, God still is a God who hates sin, not just in a circumspect way about the cross, but rather directly and especially in light of the work of Christ on the cross.

## The Holy and Just Love of God

That God is love is a plain biblical truth. Even in today’s liberal era, there’s hardly a theological or biblical reference, church creed<sup>7</sup>, hymnal, or sermon that does not echo the truth that God is love. God’s people must affirm the love of God as an attribute of God.

But what is meant by godly love? Glenn Schaefer rightly describes the advent of the Son into the world as the “pinnacle” of God’s expression of love<sup>8</sup>. Certainly God’s love is a great theme of the NT. This is what the Holy Spirit has revealed through the Apostle John, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16); and again, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10).

As such, the NT does indeed reveal the fullness of the love of God<sup>9</sup>. In fact, although the NT uses several words to describe love, the term, ἀγάπη (*agape*), stands above the others in its ability to denote the special love of God. Using this term, the Apostle John not only describes God and his actions as loving, but says, “God **is** love” (1 John 4:8) [emphasis added]. Of its many uses in the NT, J. P. Baker points out that ἀγάπη is not based on “a felt need in the loving person nor on a desire called forth by some attractive feature(s) in the one

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<sup>7</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) specifically describes God’s attribute of love as “most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin...” WCF, Chapter II, Section 1.

<sup>8</sup> Elwell, p. 494.

<sup>9</sup> This is true, at least as far as God’s love has been revealed so far. We cannot say that the love of God will not become clearer or “fuller” in the afterlife, as we share directly with him in his love.

loved<sup>10</sup>.” Boettner is in agreement as he defines godly love as “that which has the interests of others as its final motive and is therefore self-giving, sacrificial<sup>11</sup>....” Godly love is a benevolent love that is extended freely to men both generally and personally. It is initiated by God, and it stems from the very nature of God. Furthermore, God’s actions do not obey some external law or code; instead, God’s ontological and economic decrees and relations naturally arise from the perfect, moral character of himself. His love is natural expression at its purest.

Despite the clarity and fullness of the revelation of the love of God in the NT, though, it cannot be forgotten that the love feast table of the NT is set by the OT. From the creation of man, the fall of man in Genesis 3, and finally to the incarnation of the Christ, God’s love was always present. God has always had a people for himself with whom he enters into a voluntary, loving relationship. The Hebrew word, *חַשַׁק* (*chashak*), is often used to refer to this special relational love: “but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut. 7:8). God joins and joined in a special relationship with his covenant people. Rather than saying that God covenanted with his people “even” in the OT, it ought to be said that God covenanted with his people “especially” in the OT. God’s love is real and deep. It has always been so.

Futhermore, the OT Hebrew words, *אָהַב* (*‘ahab*<sup>12</sup>) and *אָהַבָה* (*‘ahabah*<sup>13</sup>), similarly reveal to us and affirm the absolute and unconditional love of God. Although Solomon had sinned as king of Israel, the prophet, Nehemiah, could still write of him, “yet among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel....” God loves his people. The list of related words could continue as Peter Lewis adds the multitude of occurrences of *חֵן* (*chen*<sup>14</sup>) and *חֶסֶד* (*cheded*<sup>15</sup>) to the list. Certainly, the love of God is present in the OT and it is as deep as the love of the NT. It only differs in that its fullness had not yet been revealed at those times.

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<sup>10</sup> Ferguson, Wright, Packer, p. 399.

<sup>11</sup> Boettner, p. 290.

<sup>12</sup> See: Deut. 23:5; 2 Sam. 12:24; Neh 13:26; Ps. 78:68; Is. 41:8-10; Hos. 14:4; Mal. 1:2.

<sup>13</sup> See: Deut. 7:8; 1 Ki. 10:9; 2 Chr. 2:11, 9:8; Jer. 31:3; Zep. 3:17.

<sup>14</sup> Denotes god’s grace and favor. The list of occurrences is enormous. For a few that appear early in the covenant history of Israel, See: Gen. 6:8, 18:3; Ex. 33:12.

<sup>15</sup> Denotes god’s mercy or loving-kindness. See: Gen 24:27, 39:21; Ex. 15:13, 20:6, 34:6-7; Ruth 2:20; 1 Sa. 20:14; 2 Sa. 9:3; 1 Ki. 3:6, 8:23; 1 Chr. 16:34; Ez. 3:11; Ps. 13:5, 25:10, 36:5-7, 52:1, 85, 136, 144:2-3; Jer. 31:3.

Yet, Boettner rightfully notes that “love, in itself, is irrational and capricious except as it is governed by holiness<sup>16</sup>.” In other words, God’s love is never divorced from His holiness. For example, the proclaimed love of God in Ex 34:6 is immediately followed by the contrasting judgment of the Lord in v. 7:

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." (Ex. 34:6-7)

Although the Lord is loving, his love is a righteous love. So, while God’s love is displayed, He cannot compromise the rest of his nature, which is simultaneously holy.

## The Holy and Just Wrath of God

Having established the love of God as a true attribute of God, let us first examine the wrath of God before venturing into the atonement of Christ. The WCF describes God as a being who is “most just, and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty<sup>17</sup>.” Two things are probably directly or indirectly taught here. First, God is just and the display of sin before his righteousness is the root cause of his indignation. Second, in his indignation, he remains just. The words of Moses support both of these ideas, “The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.” (Num 14:18). God’s anger is not rash, nor is it without self-control<sup>18</sup>. It, too, not unlike his love, stems from his nature and the very perfect being that he is. As the prophet Habakkuk writes, God’s is of “purer eyes than to behold evil” that he cannot “look on wickedness” with favor (Hab. 1:13). The OT writings are clear on the matter: “God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day.” (Ps. 7:11)<sup>19</sup>.

These same concepts are consistent in the NT and are not forsaken amidst the love of God that is freshly consummated during the advent of Our Lord. In fact, as we shall see, just as the love of God reaches a pinnacle in the NT, the revelation of God’s wrath explodes into full display also<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, after the death of Christ, Paul can still claim that the wages of sin is death; also, the writer of Hebrews can claim that God is “a consuming fire” and that it is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb. 12:29, 10:31); finally, at the very end of the NT, John reminds us of the severity of Christ’s reign for all who are not the Lamb’s: “Now out of His mouth

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<sup>16</sup> Boettner, p. 289.

<sup>17</sup> WCF Chapter II, Section 2.

<sup>18</sup> See: Ps 103:8; Isa 48:9; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3.

<sup>19</sup> The references are plentiful. For additional verses, see: Num 11:1-10; Deut 29:27; 2 Sam 6:7; Isa 5:25; 42:25; Jer 44:6; Ps 79:6.

<sup>20</sup> Again, this is true, at least as far as God’s wrath has been revealed so far. Just as with love, we must realize that in the end times the fullness of God’s wrath will become clearer. All of the wicked will be judged and condemned for all eternity at that time (See Luke 16:19-31).

goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15).

## The Unity/Simplicity and Immutability of God

The groundwork for two such seemingly polar attributes of God brings us to the point of the simplicity or unity of God. By simplicity or unity, it is meant that God "is not divided into parts, yet we see different attributes of God emphasized at different times<sup>21</sup>." As Grudem notes, God can both be referred to as light and/or love. There is no contradiction in John's writing when he exclaims that "God is light" (1 Jn. 1:5) and later that "God is love (1 Jn. 4:8)," as neither attribute covers, supersedes, or excludes the other. God is wholly both, although from time to time in his economic relations, we might see some more clearly than others. Erickson refers to this unity/simplicity as God's constancy and supports it with several texts that clearly reveal the unchanging nature of God<sup>22</sup>. The fact that God is unchanging is indisputable in scripture. Stott more closely (but of equal import) relates God's constancy to his inability to lie<sup>23</sup>. Thus we can be sure that "the counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11).

So, then, are God's love and wrath compatible? Is it right to say that God is both loving and wrathful? If both are to be attributed to God, is there a duality that exists within the being of God? Or, does one swallow the other and thus dominate? In considering these questions it is probably best to examine God's holiness and justice first. Since holiness more rightly describes God's perfect nature, and justice the rightness in the way God behaves or reacts in accordance with his holiness, the two both logically precede God's love and wrath. God is first holy, for "no one is holy like the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:2). Second, God is also just. He will most assuredly rightly reward good and punish evil. If this understanding of God's holiness and justice is correct, Peter Lewis, clarifies an important point: "when confronted with purity, righteousness, and obedience, it [God's holiness] expresses itself in blessing; when confronted with impurity, rebellion, or sin in any of its forms, it [God's holiness] expresses itself in wrath."<sup>24</sup> It is then obvious, that both love and wrath *justly* stem from God's absolutely pure and perfect *holiness*.

Therefore, as we examine the cross, we would agree with Stott, that "the way God chooses to forgive sinners and reconcile them to himself must, first and foremost, be fully consistent with his own character<sup>25</sup>." (p. 129). We must understand that the fullness of the being of God is revealed in his relations with his creation.

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<sup>21</sup> Grudem, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> Erickson, p. 278. See Ps. 102:26-27; Mal 3:6; James 1:17.

<sup>23</sup> Stott, p. 124. See Tit. 1:2, Heb. 6:18, 2 Ti. 2:13.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, p. 180.

<sup>25</sup> Stott, p. 129.



And, although we can recognize the prominence of love in various revelations of God, we must see that it magnifies the anger and wrath, which is perhaps clearer elsewhere. In the same way, God's revealed wrath serves to magnify the depth of his love. Both attributes make clear the other, whether in the OT or in the NT.

## The Cross of Christ and Forgiveness of Sin

### The Estate of Man

There is one more basic area to cover briefly as we venture into the work of the cross. Understanding the purpose in creating man and the subsequent rebellion is paramount to understanding what provokes the Lord to justly react to his creation with either love or wrath. It also sets the stage for understanding the work of Christ.

#### *Created Purpose*

It is no mere accident that God mentions we were created in the image and likeness of God. Man's chief end is, as the WSC has it, "to glorify God, and enjoy him forever<sup>26</sup>." We were created to *reflect* the glory of God, as the very word, *image*, implies. In doing so, we fulfill the purposes of God, live in communion with him, and consequently enjoy his presence. To be sure, the *imago Dei* is to be displayed in and by man.

#### *The Fall, Sin and Guilt*

However, Adam (and all of creation through and in him) frustrated the good purposes of God. Because of this one man's sin and rebellion, all of humanity fell with him and was banned from the Garden. Paul makes no mistake about our general union with Adam, the fact that we participated in a real way with Adam, when he states, "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Rom. 5:12). The aorist tense, "all sinned," in the Greek manuscripts is very significant. The focus in this verse is not that we are still sinning now (although we do). Rather, it indicates that we sinned with Adam. We with Adam as our representative are surely and fully responsible for his rebellion (for it is ours) and are guilty because of it. Furthermore, as sin has entered the world, we are guilty also of our own sins which we commit today, for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, we are guilty of sin firstly by imputation (through our union with Adam), and secondly by our own commission (our constant sinfulness today).

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<sup>26</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC), Question 1.

In recognizing this sin, we must acknowledge the gravity of our offense. David, a man loved by God, was a sinner as we are. In the after-grief of his adultery with Bathsheba, David realized the import of what he had done. His sin, like all of ours, was an affront against God, first and foremost. Although he had sinned against his neighbor and against Bathsheba herself, what David is firstly concerned about is his offense to God. So, he exclaims:

Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight --- that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. (Ps. 51:4-6)

David affirms three fundamental truths about his sin. First, he is aware of where his first sin is (in his conception, before he was even brought forth, i.e. Primarily in Adam); second, he knows that his purpose is to be true and wise in his innermost being (i.e. To be the image of God); and finally, he recognizes that it was against God and only God that he had sinned, first and foremost.

Consequently, being nothing less than pure rebellion against God himself, all sin deserves, as the WSC states it, "God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come"<sup>27</sup>. And again, as the Heidelberg Catechism has it, "He [God] is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them by a just judgment temporally and eternally, as He has declared, *Cursed is every one who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them*"<sup>28</sup>. The penitent sinner understands this and sincerely grievous guilt accompanies sin. For, it is a righteous God that has declared our sins accursed!

However, in our "enlightened" day, as Alistair McGrath has pointed out, guilt is not too popular<sup>29</sup>. The impact of the Enlightenment, the rise of human psychology, and today's continued humanistic focus all serve to portray guilt as a figment of our imaginations. Robert Letham probably best highlights the bottom line of this Pelagian<sup>30</sup> sympathy for man: "Two world wars, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and countless revelations of human wickedness have rendered the position untenable." There is sin - real sin. Appropriately, guilt ought to accompany sin. Thus, as a prelude to the preaching of the cross of Christ, the great preacher, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, could exclaim:

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<sup>27</sup> WSC, Question 84.

<sup>28</sup> HC, Question 9.

<sup>29</sup> McGrath, p. 404.

<sup>30</sup> Pelagianism was a 5<sup>th</sup> Century rendition of today's self-help, self-empowerment movement, advanced by Pelagius, who insisted that man was free from the stains of sin and that man could - with a little bit of determination - do God's will and please Him. As this was clearly an unbiblical teaching in all facets, the unrepentant Pelagius was condemned by the Council of Carthage in 418. Later, that same year, pope Zosimus followed with a condemnation of his teachings. His followers were also condemned in the following years.

I do not know you, my friends, not individually, most of you, but this is the wonderful thing about the work of a preacher, he does not need to know his congregation. Do you know why? Because I know the most important thing about every single one of you, and that is that each of you is a vile sinner.<sup>31</sup>

## The Divine Dilemma

Thus, when we look at the cross as God's provision for forgiving his people of grievous sin, we must certainly see the depth of his love. But, at the same time, while Christ was sent to save the sinner, to die for the "ungodly," we must see also the dilemma posed prior to the decree of salvation through the cross. Now, when we use the word, "dilemma," we must not assume that in God's mind, there was difficulty in figuring out how to forgive man, for this is silly. God, certainly had the foresight to see the sin of Adam, and afterwards he certainly was not "hand-cuffed" or looking for some last-ditch effort to save his people. God knew from before all time that he was to create man, that man would fall, and that he would send his son. However, we must recognize, at least in our own human minds, that there is what Stott calls and dedicates a whole chapter to: the "problem" of forgiveness.

Salvation for man, is not solely a matter of the love of God. This is what the Socinians<sup>32</sup> and Peter Abelhard<sup>33</sup> simplified the cross to. This would leave one wondering why Christ died an accursed and shameful death on the cross. Neither of these views would do justice to the true nature of God.

Similarly, salvation of man is not solely a matter of the "sovereign will of God." Boettner makes this point well:

"If the forgiveness of sin depended only on the sovereign will of God, there would, of course, be no need for atonement.... The tendency in some modern systems of theology is to merge holiness and love and to assume that God can forgive sin without an atonement.... The popular literature of our day abounds with many ill-considered assertions of the indiscriminate love of God, as though He were too broadly good to hold man to any real account for sin." (Boettner, p. 289-90)

God did not and will not save man or act otherwise apart from his total being and attributes. God's sovereignty and love are not to be lifted above his holiness and justness.

## The Atonement of Christ

This might lead one to ask, as the HC reads, "Is, then, God not also merciful?" As we shall see, "God is indeed merciful, but He is also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul." It is in the cross of Christ, that the full character of God is amplified and beautifully revealed.

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<sup>31</sup> Lloyd-Jones, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> The Socinians viewed the work of the mission of Christ as prophetic at the expense of it being priestly. The atonement, they say, was an example of how we should live and love.

## *Curse, Justice and Wrath*

*Credo in... Iesum Christum... crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus, descendit ad inferos*<sup>34</sup>.... Do we really believe in Jesus Christ, “who was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell...”? All too often we fly right over the text in our corporate confession of the apostolic faith and never ask or ponder, why the Christ should suffer all of these horrid things? In answering this question, we would do well to remember that Christ was our great High Priest, according to the scriptures<sup>35</sup>. The WSC is right when it exclaims, that “Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us”<sup>36</sup>. Before his sheep could be made right with God, the Christ, first had to provide atonement for their sins.

Certainly, the OT provides the backdrop of Christ’s priestly work. One of the clearest shadowings of the coming of Christ and his work was the Hebrew festival, the Day of Atonement, יוֹם כִּפּוּר (Yowm Kippur). This festival lays, perhaps, one of the plainest and clearest foundations for understanding atonement<sup>37</sup>. During this time on the tenth day of the seventh month, the high priest first would wash and then clothe himself in white to cleanse himself. After he offered a bull for his own sins, he then officiated before God for the people in offering two goats. The first goat was offered as a sacrifice and the blood was sprinkled about the mercy seat. The high priest then placed his hands on the second goat, confessed over it the sins of the people, and finally sent it into the wilderness. As a precursor to Christ’s atonement, we learn two very important truths from the two goats that were offered. The first goat that was sacrificed was the penalty offered to appease the wrath of God (propitiation). The second goat that was sent into the wilderness took with it the sins of the people and symbolized the removal of sin (expiation).

So then, in the OT, forgiveness is accompanied by penalty. Although a substitution is made for the sin bearer, atonement nonetheless involves penalty. The scriptures confirm this outside of Leviticus 16. In his ministry with the disciples (Matt. 20:22-23), in the Garden before his betrayal (Matt. 26:39-40), and amidst his betrayal (Jn.

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<sup>33</sup> Abelhard’s “Moral Influence Theory” was similar to the Soccinians in that it diminished the priestly office of Christ. However, it viewed the work of Christ much more as a revelation of what God is - love.

<sup>34</sup> The Apostles Creed (AC).

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession...” (Heb. 3:1).

<sup>36</sup> Question 25.

<sup>37</sup> Realize, that this was a shadow of the work of Christ to come. The OT sacrifices could never atone for the sins of the people, as the writer of Hebrews points out. (Heb. 10:1-4, 9:23-28). Even though the high priest took care to wash and remain clean it was impossible to start without some remnant of sin present. Hence, the need for the perfect offering, the Christ, who was both the spotless priest and offering.

18:11) Jesus Christ was preparing to receive the dreaded cup of God, which is the clearly wrath of God<sup>38</sup>. In his death, Christ was actually accursed, as we read that “cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

Our sins were placed on Christ, so that vicariously they could be atoned for. Christ, as a perfect man without blemish<sup>39</sup>, had no need to be made perfect to officiate as high priest (no need to wash himself, wear white, or offer a bull for himself). Furthermore, since Christ was also the sacrifice itself, he was more perfect than an actual animal without blemish; and, as a man he was a better sacrifice than an animal. Therefore, he was able to take upon himself our sins, as the scriptures clearly teach: “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet 2:24); and again, “for He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:21); and yet again, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). It is this latter dimension, that of ransom, which B. B. Warfield belabors for an entire chapter of his work on Christ. Warfield, in stressing that we cannot view the mission of Christ as merely deliverance from sin, observes that many in our day hide bad deliverance-theologies of the cross behind the word, “redeemer.” Because this word today no longer carries with it the connotation of a “purchase” as does the word, “ransomer,” Warfield proposes:

Men who have ceased to think of the work of Christ in terms of purchasing, and to whom the whole conception of His giving His life for us as a ransom, or of His pouring out His blood as a price paid for our sins, has become abhorrent, feel little difficulty, therefore, in still speaking of Him as our Redeemer, and of His work as a Redemption, and of the Christianity which He founded as a Redemptive Religion<sup>40</sup>.

Redemption in Christ involved a cost, so that deliverance could be made. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and all of the other religions of the world purport to offer deliverance; but it is only Christianity that offers One who has paid the price.<sup>41</sup> Therefore and with confidence, the Apostle Peter can teach, “nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts, 4:12).

So, L. L. Morris sums it up well, “if there is no wrath there is no salvation<sup>42</sup>.” It is in Christ, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14)<sup>43</sup>. As B. B. Warfield writes, “The theology of the writers of the New Testament is very distinctly a ‘blood theology.’<sup>44</sup>”

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<sup>38</sup> Ps. 11:6; Is. 51:17; Jer. 49:12; Ez. 23:33.

<sup>39</sup> The deity and sinless humanity of Christ is essential to his work. See: Is. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15, 7:26-27, 9:28; 1 Jn. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:22.

<sup>40</sup> B. B. Warfield, p. 337.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23.

<sup>42</sup> Ferguson, Wright, and Packer, p. 732.

<sup>43</sup> See also Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5.

<sup>44</sup> B. B. Warfield, p. 423.

## *Blessing, Holiness and Love*

So, after the WCF states that “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of His Father,…” it adds, “and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father has given unto Him<sup>45</sup>.” The evidences of God’s love may be found in both aspects of the cross, the payment of the penalty and that which was purchased.

Firstly, behind the display of wrath in the cross of Christ, God’s love was still present working “good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). For, it is written, “for scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die” (Rom. 5:7). Christ’s dying on the cross, we have shown, was an event that came voluntarily from the will of God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the price was paid willingly and the rights and privileges owned by his people are guaranteed. Most importantly, they are **not** guaranteed as something “due us” outside of God’s love. One cannot exclaim, “the payment is made, therefore we are due eternal life through forgiveness,” as if the fruits are ours outside of the love of God. The Christian in John Gerstner’s *Theology in Dialogue* explains:

It is by the mercy of God that Christ’s full payment of God’s justice makes it absolutely obligatory for that just God to receive a repentant sinner, who trust in Jesus Christ. God’s mercy, in other words, satisfied His justice. Or to put it another way, God’s willingness to be merciful is what led Him to “so love the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” His love, in the form of mercy, led to His satisfying His justice by the gift of Jesus Christ. Or to put it still another way, that gift of mercy was the satisfaction of divine justice<sup>46</sup>.”

We cannot “take God to court,” so to speak, as the law does not exist apart from God. As emphasized earlier, the law originated in and is the natural codification of God’s perfection. Therefore, our salvation is due us, only in the provisions God has lovingly made for us. Let us hear the hymn:

What Wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this, O my Soul!  
What wondrous love is this  
That caused the Lord of bliss  
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul  
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul.<sup>47</sup>

But, not only was Christ born under the law to show his love for us, he was “born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). His obedience under the law is our obedience. It is transferred to his sheep and it is Christ’s righteousness that God will see in

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter VII, Section 5.

<sup>46</sup> Gerstner, p. 353-354.

<sup>47</sup> *Celebration Hymnal*. Hymn #314, American Folk Hymn.

us at the great and last day. Were his eyes not to see Christ in us, we would have no chance to enter his kingdom. Consequently, there are great benefits which the believer has claim on. Christ's sheep are being made righteous in him, so that they can enjoy eternity with God Almighty. No gift can eclipse this in greatness.

There is one last point to consider, before moving into one of the greatest facets of the Christian's life - union with Christ. Some have argued that God needed to create man in order that his love be shown (it is acknowledged by all, including this writer, that love necessarily requires at least two persons, the lover and the one loved). Furthermore, this external dependence of God is pushed so far, that it is then affirmed that God had a need to not only create man, but that he must have saved at least one person, that this love might be full. However, in making such claims, one is ignoring the splendor of the Triune God. For it is in the ontology of the Triune God, we must remember, that God expresses his love purely and independent of all other beings. The love of the Father for the Son and the Spirit, the love of the Son for the Father and the Spirit, and the love of the Spirit for the Father and the Son is love at its finest and highest degree. God, therefore, never was loveless. Before man was created, before God chose to save his lost children, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were love, shared love, and defined love. God's love is full and complete with or without created and/or saved man.

### *Union with Christ*

One might next ask, how a substitution can be fair. Because Christ's choice to save was voluntary, this eliminates the need to ask why it is fair for the innocent to suffer for sinners. God (Father, Son & Holy Ghost) willingly chose to do this. However, what can be said of man? Man has been set free, scot-free. Or has he? If he has not, then how can we say that God's justice has actually been served?

First of all, God determines what is fair and we cannot view God in the exact same way we view man. Secondly and just as importantly, we must realize that this payment was not merely an outward transaction. The saved sinner's union with Christ is first and foremost of consideration here. The second Adam is our federal head, just as was the first (Rom. 5). We're not talking, according to Letham, about a simple "generic" or "biological unity," but a real spiritual union<sup>48</sup>. Even before the foundation of the world, we were chosen "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3-4). In fact, the entirety of our salvation is worked out in terms of our union with Christ. Murray dedicates a chapter to showing that we are saved (Eph. 1:7), recreated (Eph. 2:10), live as Christians (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 1:4-5; 1 Cor.

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<sup>48</sup> Letham, p. 76.

6:15-17), die (Ps. 116:15; 1 Thes. 4:14,16), and are resurrected and glorified (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 15:22) all in Christ<sup>49</sup>.

Although, we can take no credit for the work of redemption (how could man add anything to a payment made by God), the sinner does not go unpunished. In a very real way, the sinner was present in the sufferings of the cross. In the entirety of Christ's life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, the Christian has shared. Gerstner's Inquirer summarizes it well:

If Christ voluntarily suffered for my sins, then He did suffer for *my* sins. He was punished in *my* place. Vicariously He endured for *me*. In that profound sense, I was punished in Him.... Christ was my vicar, my substitute. In my place, He suffered my punishment. So in a very real way, I *was punished for my sin*. I did not go free<sup>50</sup>.

"In other words, we may never think of redemption in abstraction from the mysterious arrangements of God's love and wisdom and grace by which Christ was united to his people and his people were united to him when he died upon the accursed tree and rose again from the dead." (Murray, p. 162-163)

## Conclusion

Especially in a substitutionary and sacrificial view of the cross, a multitude of Christian teachings become clear. Our understanding of the one covenant of grace that underlies the entire bible is unified, as God is the God of both the New and Old Testaments. The atonement is pictured and founded in the Old Testament before it fully unfolds in the New. Moreover, the extent of the atonement, that Christ died and was raised for his sheep and only his sheep is unavoidable with a substitutionary view of the atonement. For, how could Christ have suffered for all men and yet some still spend the eternities in hell? In addition, how could our justification, then, that forensic declaration of God that we are cleared of our sins, come any other way! Could anyone other than the Christ have paid a penalty acceptable to God, outside of our own forever burning in hell? That Christ lived for us under the law further increases our confidences we have in this life and that which is to come. For Christ's righteousness is ours through faith! It is to him, that we can defer the eyes of God in the day of judgment. Salvation by faith is likewise affirmed, for there is no other way to be justified, as our salvation is a gift, not of works, lest any man should boast! Had we to depend on our own righteousness, we would fail miserably. God's righteousness requires nothing less than the righteousness of Christ. Indeed, it also requires nothing more, as nothing can be added to this! Nonetheless, the believer, as he basks in the awe of such a work done especially for him, can help do

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<sup>49</sup> Murray, pp. 162-164.

<sup>50</sup> Gerstner, p. 343.



nothing but live for God. His justification having already been obtained and secured, the believer can then move on to love the Lord and live for him out of love and gratitude and in honor to his glory. Consequently, our faith is completed in our works, it explodes into a life of service, which we offer to God as our reasonable duty. And it is all offered that he might be glorified among the nations.

It is in this regard, that any Christian claimed by the love of God may rightfully boast "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). God has shared with us his love in providing a perfect sacrifice to ransom us from a debt we could not pay. Furthermore, his wrath was satisfied in the punishment that the Holy one suffered. Because of this, a true doctrine of the cross which holds God's nature and being at the fore, we can exclaim with the four living creatures, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4:8). For in the cross and only in the cross is man made free.

# Appendix

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## Abbreviations

- AC: Apostles Creed, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century (?).
- HC: Heidelberg Catechism
- NT: New Testament
- OT: Old Testament
- WCF: Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646
- WSC: Westminster Shorter Catechism,