

(Devotional #39) **What is The True Gospel? – The Second Imputation:
The Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction – Part 1**

HE (God the Father) made HIM (God the Son), who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him – 2 Corinthians 5:21

Christ, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH, also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in His steps; being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept trusting in Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, 'FOR BY HIS WOUNDS YOU WERE HEALED' – 1 Peter 2:21-24

For all sinned¹ and are falling short¹ of the glory² of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation³ in His blood through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed⁴ – Romans 3:23-25

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us – for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE'⁵ – Galatians 3:13

In the last two devotionals, our focus was on **the first** of three great biblical imputations, **the imputation of Adam's single transgression to the human race** that has left all of Adam's progeny in such a sorry state – a state of divine condemnation.

In the broader scope of things, we are considering **the Doctrine of Salvation** from the perspective of three imputations: (1) **the imputation of Adam's transgression to the human race**, (2) **the imputation of the sin of Adam (and all the personal sins committed by his descendants) to Jesus on the cross**, and (3) **the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers**. Having concluded that all of the human race is rendered guilty as a result of Adam's transgression, we turn today to

¹ The verb tenses of the words 'sinned' and 'are falling short' are pertinent. The word 'sinned' is written in the **Aorist tense** in Greek. This means the verb points back to a specific act at a specific moment in time, namely to the single transgression of Adam in the Garden of Eden that was imputed to the human race, such that 'all sinned.' (The text should **NOT** be translated 'all have sinned,' but rather, 'all sinned.) This is NOT a reference to personal sins or to a lifestyle of sin. On the other hand, the verb 'are falling short' is written in the **Present tense** in Greek. This verb points to all the personal sins of individuals that we continually commit, any one of which would condemn us, even apart from Adam's transgression. So, the meaning of the verse is, **'all members of the human race are condemned under the sin of Adam ('all sinned') and as a result, we all continue to sin ('are falling short') as a result of our position 'in Adam.'**

² 'Glory' (δόξα – pronounced 'doxa') in Romans 3:23 refers to an exalted state. It is a standard to which only God can attain. It is that condition in which God the Father in heaven exists and lives, and to which Christ has been exalted. (See 2 Peter 1:17).

³ The Latin Vulgate translates 'THE MERCY SEAT' — the lid of the Arc of the Covenant on which the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled by the high priest on the Day of Atonement — by the Latin term '**propitiatorium**.' This is because what is in view is '**expiation**,' the complete and total cancellation of **our sins and Adam's sin** by the death of Christ on the cross. By Christ's death, God's Perfect Justice is fully satisfied (cf. Exodus 25:17-22; Leviticus 16:2, 13-15; Hebrews 9:5).

⁴ Remember in our last lesson on **Original Sin: Evidence from the New Testament**, I made the point that "between Adam and Moses sin was in the world but sin was not imputed when there is no law" (see Romans 5:13-14)? Well, during that time it was 'God's forbearance,' His willingness to postpone immediate judgment based on the atonement that by divine providence was certain to occur (Acts 2:22-24) and on the basis of which sins would be 'expiated' ... i.e., 'wiped away.'

⁵ Lit., "who hangs on wood" — i.e., "who hangs on a cross."

the Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction. In other words, we have addressed and accepted the bad news, now we are turning to the good news, otherwise known as ***'the gospel.'***

THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SATISFACTION IS THE IDEA THAT ALL THE DEMANDS EMANATING FROM THE DIVINE NATURE AS A RESULT OF ADAM'S SIN – (and the subsequent, personal sins of the human race) HAVE BEEN MET TO GOD'S COMPLETE AND PERFECT SATISFACTION IN CHRIST.

Throughout the Bible, it is clear that sinners (*i.e., all the progeny of Adam*) cannot make an appeal to God on the basis of who **THEY** are; sinners can appeal to God only on the basis of who **HE** is. Now this is an important distinction as we consider the topic of today's lesson because it raises questions: *'In whom does God find satisfaction? What exactly does 'the Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction' mean? Who is 'satisfied,' and 'on what basis is this 'satisfaction' achieved?'*

Sir Alister Hardy spent his life studying comparative religions. He spoke in 1965 as part of the Gifford Lectures at the University of Glasgow in Scotland; subsequently, his lectures were published under the title, *The Divine Flame*. In these lectures, he raised the rhetorical question, ***"If Jesus were living on the earth today, would he be a Christian?"*** This was his answer:

I feel certain Jesus would not preach to us of a God, who would be appeased by the cruel sacrifice of a tortured body ... I cannot accept either the hypothesis that the appalling death of Jesus was a sacrifice in the eyes of God for the sins of the world, or that God, in the shape of His Son, tortured himself for our redemption. I can only confess that I find such religious ideas to be among the least attractive in the whole of anthropology⁶.

How different is Alister Hardy's understanding of the death of Christ from the words of Isaiah:

*Surely, He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement for our peace was upon Him – and with His stripes we are healed. Yet it pleased the LORD to crush Him, putting Him to grief – **Isaiah 53:4-5, 10^B***

It troubles me that Alister Hardy could go so far afield from the teaching of Scripture, but it does not surprise me that others have wrestled with similar questions ... not the absurd question of whether Jesus would be a Christian, but the questions I raised a moment ago: *In whom does God find 'satisfaction'? What exactly does 'the Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction' mean? Who is 'satisfied,' and on what basis is 'satisfaction' achieved?*

The Early Greek Fathers⁷ understood the Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction in the context of the Fall of Adam, namely that because of the sin of Adam, mankind has been held captive, not only to sin, but held in bondage to Satan himself. Satan was seen as *the great tyrant* from whom Jesus came to liberate us. Though this is true, many carried this idea to an extreme and attributed more prominence to Satan than he actually deserves. It was a common belief among the early Greek Fathers that the death of Christ was *a RANSOM paid to Satan* in return for the release of those, whom he held in bondage. **Origen** was the first to formalize this teaching. His mistake was not in seeing the cross as the means by which Satan was defeated, but in believing the atonement was a transaction between God and Satan.

⁶ If indeed this is what Sir Alister Hardy believed, and unless he rejected this heresy as his understanding of the death of Christ before his death in 1985, he is as lost as Judas Iscariot and is his companion in eternal perdition.

⁷ Here I am referring to such men as Origen, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Athanasius of Alexandria.

*It is **CORRECT** to see the atonement as the instrument by which Satan was defeated, but it is **INCORRECT** to think Christ's death was a ransom **OWED** to Satan. God does not owe anything to Satan other than free transportation to the Lake of Fire.*

A few centuries after Origen, there was a shift in thinking that led to a different understanding of the atonement. Since Adam's transgression involved breaking the command (*LAW*) of God not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and since a transgression involves law-breaking, **THE LAW ITSELF** was seen as **THE REASON** (or *the Moral Necessity*) behind God's demand for satisfaction – *specifically, the idea that **divine law cannot be broken with impunity**.*

As with the early Greek Fathers, who elevated Satan to a position he does not deserve, the Latin Fathers erred by elevating the Law to a position it does not deserve. Now there is legal language in the Bible that supports the premise that divine law cannot be broken with impunity ... and we are going to see some of that language in the course of covering this topic ... **but there is a danger in viewing the Law as an end unto itself.**

In fact, the Law is **NOT** an end unto itself. The Law **DOES**, however, reflect the Moral Character of God, yet **GOD IS NEVER THE PRISONER OF HIS OWN CREATION**. God is under no obligation to the Law; rather, *He is the Creator of it ... it emanates from His own Being*. The reason disobedience brings condemnation, whether by noncompliance with the written Law of Moses or the Moral Law, is that the Law is the expression of God's own Moral Nature. Whatever is rightfully due to the Law in terms of obedience is due because it is the Law of God, and obedience is due to God Himself.

So, to sum up, the early Greek Fathers understood the cross primarily as 'satisfaction paid in the form of a ransom to Satan,' while the early Latin Fathers saw it as 'satisfaction for breaking the Law of God.' But by the 11th Century, **Anselm** was offering yet a new explanation, *viz.*, that **the cross was 'satisfaction for mankind's offense of God's Honor.'** Correctly, Anselm agreed that Satan needed to be defeated and that this defeat occurred at Calvary. Also, he pointed out that Christ's death was **NOT** a ransom paid to Satan, for God owed nothing to Satan but punishment. **IT WAS MANKIND WHO OWED SOMETHING TO GOD** – and this is **the big switch** in thinking brought to light by Anselm. Anselm defined 'sin' as 'not rendering to God what is due,' *viz.*, the submission of the human will ... in its entirety ... to His Will. By withholding from God what is His due, 'mankind infringed on God's Honor,' and that Honor must be appeased.

But the question is, **HOW IS IT APPEASED?** Good works cannot appease God because they are required of us anyway. According to Anselm, salvation based on good works is impossible because even if man lived his whole life doing only good works, *he would have done only the minimum of what is required of him*⁸. So we cannot save ourselves by doing good; nor can any other man save us, since he cannot even save himself. Anselm concluded that the only way out of the *sin-dilemma* is by a divine act, and the only Being capable of appeasing God on behalf of man ... is God Himself. These conclusions led Anselm to the 'fully-God, fully-man' Savior⁹: *Jesus Christ (as expressed in the Chalcedonian Creed of 451 A.D.)*. However, like the other, former attempts to understand the atonement, **Anselm's solution contains both truth and error**. Anytime

⁸ Beyond this, 'good works,' even if they could atone for our personal sins (which they cannot), would have no effect on Adam's sin, the guilt of which already has been imputed to the entire human race.

⁹ In order to represent the human race, Jesus had to be 'fully man,' but for His sacrifice to be of infinite value, He had to be 'fully God.' The nature of Christ is a mystery that the human mind cannot fully understand; it is revealed by the Holy Spirit and must be accepted by faith.

the atonement is presented as ‘*satisfaction*,’ either toward God’s Law or God’s Honor, if these are objectified as existing apart from God Himself, we tread on ‘*thin theological ice*.’

ENTER THE REFORMATION (16th CAD):

Calvin wrote: “***There is a perpetual and irreconcilable disagreement between righteousness and unrighteousness***¹⁰,” and this irreconcilable disagreement demands a resolution.

Luther concluded that a triple requirement had to be met for salvation to be possible:

- (1) On God’s Part: His great mercy and grace;
- (2) On Christ’s Part: The satisfaction of God’s Perfect Justice (*by means of the cross*), and ...
- (3) On Man’s Part: A true and lively faith.

Ultimately these were condensed to a double satisfaction: ‘*God’s Law and God’s Justice*.’ According to the followers of Luther:

- (1) ***God’s Law*** was satisfied by Christ’s life of perfect obedience to the Law, and
- (2) ***God’s Justice*** was satisfied by his perfect sacrifice for sin, which he accomplished on the cross.

Well, I think we have spent enough time in the annals of church history to see that understanding the atonement is not child’s play. Thousands of hours have been spent by great thinkers in an attempt to understand what the death of Christ really means, so it should not surprise us that apart from a diligent study of the Scriptures, it is easy to be confused.

In our next lesson on this most important topic, we will turn to the Scriptures, specifically to Galatians 3:10-14 and to 2 Corinthians 5:21, in order to arrive at a proper definition of Divine Satisfaction¹¹.

In the Galatians passage, Paul will discuss the imputation of sin to Jesus Christ. He will not use the term ‘*imputation*,’ but the principle is in play, *viz.* that the sin of Adam was imputed to the human race, and as a result, death befell all men; however, here Paul will put forth ***the remedy*** for that first imputation: *viz.*, ***the death of Jesus Christ on the cross***.

Paul’s argument rests on the principle of imputation, the same principle by which condemnation and death came upon all men because of Adam’s sin ... and ***it is by this same principle that forgiveness and eternal life are possible*** ... because God charged Adam’s sin, along with all of the personal sins of all of Adam’s descendants, to Jesus, who paid the penalty for them by dying on the cross.

Furthermore, Paul will make the point that salvation is a ‘*faith-alone in Christ-alone*’ proposition. This is the central truth of the gospel, but it is vanishing from the pulpits of America. In its place we are hearing more-and-more ***a JESUS-AND-(fill-in-the-blank)*** reinterpretation of the gospel. ‘*Salvation by grace through faith*’ too often is being replaced by a ‘*salvation by works*’ theology that not only is unbiblical but is nothing less than outright heresy. Good works, be they attending church, working at a church, teaching a class, joining a church, serving on a committee, participating in a worship experience of whatever kind, or ***-(fill-in-the-blank)*** ... none of these things merit the gift of eternal life that comes only by faith in Christ-alone.

This will be our task next week ... to clarify from Scripture what God did through Christ, so that we have a clear understanding of the basis for our salvation.

¹⁰ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin, 2.16.3.

¹¹ Please read these two passages this week in preparation for next week’s devotional.