

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 4. Its Pre-requisites

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

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Before we are in the position to discern what was required in order for an atonement to be made for the sins of believers, or more specifically, what were the qualifications which must be possessed by him who should render an acceptable satisfaction to God, it is essential that we should know something of the actual nature of the Atonement itself. This we shall endeavor to define at length in the chapters which are to immediately follow; but, to pave the way for a more intelligent consideration of the perfections of the Mediator, let us briefly state what it was that Christ came here to do. The Son of God became the Son of man in order that sons of men might become sons of God. But these sons of men were not merely creatures, they were fallen and sinful creatures, and, as such, hateful to God, and under the condemnation of His inexorable law. Sin has produced a tremendous gulf between the thrice holy God and the rebellious children of Adam. Man has no ability whatever to fill in or pass over that gulf. Not only is he alienated from his Maker (Eph. 4:18), but that law which he has broken insists upon full reparation, and this, man is incompetent to render. Thus, his case is desperate indeed. His only hope, as we sought to show near the close of our last chapter, lies in a mediator espousing his cause, a mediator acceptable to that God whom man has so grossly and grievously offended, a mediator both willing and qualified to undertake for him. But where was such an one to be found? where was one who could bridge the awful gulf sin had made, who was fitted to be entrusted with the interests of the Godhead, and who was capable of representing those who were, in the scale of being, so far, far below Him? "Although man had remained immaculately innocent, yet his condition would have been too mean for him to approach to God without a Mediator. What, then, can he do, after having been plunged by his fatal fall into death and hell, defiled with so many blasphemies, putrefying in his own corruptions; in a word, overwhelmed by every curse? Since our iniquities, like a cloud, intervene between us and God, entirely alienating us from heaven, no one that could not approach to God could be a mediator for the restoration of peace. But who could have approached Him? Could any of the children of Adam? No; they, with their first parent, dreaded the Divine presence. What, then, could be done? Our situation was truly deplorable, unless the Divine majesty itself would descend to us; for we could not ascend to it. Thus it was necessary (as arising from the heavenly decree) that the Son of God should become Immanuel, that is, God with us" (Calvin's Institutes, Book 2, Chap. 12). Yet instead of removing, this only seems to increase, the difficulty. As we have pointed out above, atonement could only be effected by a full satisfaction rendered to the Law; and this involved two things: first, a perfect obedience given to all its precepts; second, a full endurance of its unrelenting

punishment. But how could a Divine Person enter the place of subserviency and become subject to the Law's demands? And again, how could a Divine Person suffer and die? This seems an insolvable problem, yet Divine wisdom provided a glorious solution. One of the Eternal Three, without in anywise ceasing to be God, took upon Him the form of a Servant and became Man. The Divine incarnation was undertaken in order to accomplish sin's expiation. The eternal Word's becoming flesh was a gracious means to a glorious end: it was that He might mediate between God and His people. A mediator is one who intervenes between two parties at variance and makes peace. He must of necessity be a different person from each of the parties whom it is his design to reconcile; he can neither be the party which is offended, nor the party which has given offense. The party offended may forgive the offender; but in such a case, a mediator is not wanted. The party offending may be sorry for his conduct, and earnestly desire that peace be made; but he may have no access to the party offended, or the latter may reject his advances, because he does not deem the proffered satisfaction to be adequate. In this case a third party may interpose to adjust the difference, by the proposal of terms in which both will acquiesce. What has just been pointed out raises a further difficulty: was not God the Son the party offended by the sinner, equally with the Father and the Spirit? Assuredly, for in His essential being, He is one with Them. But the Scriptures not only reveal the absolute unity of nature and essence in the three Persons of the Godhead, they also make known an economy or arrangement among those Persons, by which different characters and offices were assigned to each, and new relations are sustained by Them toward one another and toward us. In the economy of Redemption and its connection with the world, the Father appeals in the character of the Supreme Governor of heaven and earth, the Son as Mediator, and the Spirit as the Applier of Redemption. In His office of Mediator, Christ does not press the claims of justice against sinners, but stands forth as their Friend, rescuing them from their perilous situation by rendering satisfaction for them to their offended Sovereign. "The necessity of the mediation of Christ arises from the existence of sin; which being contrary to the nature and revealed will of God, renders those who have committed it obnoxious to His displeasure. As they had no means of appeasing His anger, the interposition of another person was requisite to atone for their guilt, and lay the foundation of peace. This is the great design of His office; but it extends to all the acts, by which sinners are actually brought into a state of reconciliation, are fitted for holding communion with God, and are raised to perfection and immutable felicity in the world to come. It comprehends the particular offices which our Savior is represented as sustaining, the prophetic, the sacerdotal, and the regal; and it is by executing these that He completely performs the duties, and realizes the character of a Mediator" (Dr. J. Dick). Let us now particularize by endeavoring to point out what was required in the one who should make atonement for sinners to God. 1. THE MEDIATOR MUST BE MAN "The mediator between God and men cannot be God only, or man only. This is taught in Galatians 3:20: 'A mediator is not of one, but God is one.' A mediator supposes two parties between whom he intervenes; but God is only one party. Consequently, the Mediator between God and men must be related to both, and be the equal of either. He cannot be simply God, who is only one of the parties, and has only one nature. Therefore the eternal Word must take man's nature into union with Himself if He would be a mediator between God and men. The same truth is taught in 1 Samuel 2:25, 'For if one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?' 'Therefore when He [the mediator] cometh into the world, He saith, A body hast Thou prepared me' (Heb. 10:5)" (Dr. J. Shedd). Relationship of nature to those for whom Atonement was made is an essential element in its validity. Christ was required to be real and proper man, as well as true God. To qualify Him for the work of redemption, He needed to possess opposite attributes: a frail and mortal nature, combined with ineffable dignity of person. Humanity was requisite to fit the Messiah for suffering, to render Him susceptible of pain and death, to make it possible for Him to offer

Himself as a sacrifice. Equally so was the possession of human nature required in order to impart validity to what He did, to give to His obedience and sufferings an essential value in the estimation of God's law. The work of our redemption being a moral satisfaction to the law of God for the sins of men, there existed a moral fitness that the satisfaction should be made by one in the nature of those who had sinned. It is striking to note in the types how that redemption had to be effected by a near kinsman (Lev. 25:25-27; Ruth 4:7). Unless the Redeemer Himself possesses the nature of those to be redeemed the moral government of God had not been vindicated, nor the glory of the Divine Lawgiver been maintained, nor the principles of the law been upheld. The law in its precept was suited to man, and in its curse had a claim upon man. Its requirements were such as man only could fulfill; its penalty such as one possessing the nature of man only could bear. The penalty was suffering unto death; and no angel could die (Luke 20:36). The death only of a man could possess a moral and legal congruity to the cause of a law given to man and broken by man. Thus, it was not only to qualify Him for suffering that the Messiah took upon Him the nature of man, but to qualify Him for such sufferings as should possess validity in the eye of the Divine law. "For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified, are all of one. . . Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren... to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:11, 17). "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21). The law required that its subject should love God with all his soul and serve Him with all the members of his body, seeing both are God's. Now none can do this but man, who consists of soul and body. Again; the law required the love of our neighbor, but none is our neighbor but man, who is of the same blood with us: hence the force of those words — "that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh" (Isa. 58:7). Hence our Surety must cherish us, as one does his own flesh, and consequently we have to be "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Eph. 4:30). Therefore has the Holy Spirit joined together these two things about Christ: "made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4), intimating that the principal end of his incarnation was that He might be subject to the law. "It is not without reason that Paul, when asked to exhibit Christ in the character of a Mediator, expressly speaks of Him as a man: 'There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2:5). He might have called Him God, or might indeed have omitted the appellation of man, as well as that of God; but because the Spirit, who spake by him knew our infirmity, He has provided a very suitable remedy against it, by placing the Son of God familiarly amongst us (Christians, A.W.P.) as though He were one of us. Therefore, that no one may distress himself where he is to seek the Mediator or in what way he may approach Him, the apostle, by denominating Him a man, apprizes us that He is near, and even close to us, since He is our own flesh. He certainly intends the same in Hebrews 4:15" (J. Calvin).

2. THE MEDIATOR MUST BE SINLESS He who makes atonement for others must himself be entirely free from that which renders the atonement necessary. That which made atonement necessary was sin. The redeemer must be sinless, otherwise he would require redeeming. A sinner cannot expiate his own sins, still less can he be a savior of others. Thus it was a prime prerequisite that the substitutionary victim should himself be undefiled, pure. This was plainly foreshadowed in the types. The lamb used in sacrifice must be "without blemish." The red heifer must not only be flawless, but also one "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). The Levitical high priest was required to possess a high degree of ceremonial purity. "Legal obligation to the curse may arise from one or both of two things: either from being born under the curse, that is to say, from original sin; or from becoming exposed to the penalty in consequence of a personal breach of its requirements, that is by actual transgression. Infants of the human family are under it in the former way; adults in both; but Jesus was neither the one nor the other" (Dr. W. Symington on The Atonement, 1854). Jesus was never under the Adamic covenant, and therefore the sin of our first father was never imputed to Him. He was supernaturally conceived of a virgin, and therefore, the virus of sin never entered His veins.

3. THE

MEDIATOR MUST BE HOLY More than a sinless nature was required by the Redeemer. Satan was, originally, created without sin; yet he fell. Adam had no impurity in his nature when he left His Maker's hands, yet he transgressed. But Jesus Christ was not merely negatively sinless, He was, in His very humanity, positively holy — "that holy thing, which shall be born of thee" (Luke 1:35) were the words of God to His mother. It is striking and blessed to note that when the Holy Spirit exhibits, from the human side, the personal perfections of our High Priest, He speaks of Him first as "holy," which refers to the intrinsic excellency of His nature; then as "harmless" which speaks of His entire freedom from evil in respect to conduct; "undefiled," which denotes the absolute purity of His official qualification and administration (Heb. 7:26). The intrinsic and unsullied purity of the Mediator was necessary to the acceptance of His services. Beautifully has Dr. Dick pointed out, "This primitive purity He retained during the course of His life, conversing and familiarly associating with sinners, but not learning their ways. He died, indeed, as a criminal, but He died for sins not His own: He 'suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God' (1 Pet. 3:18). Nay, He was not only free from actual transgression, He was incapable of sin; so fortified against temptation, that He could not be seduced... He stood firm in the severest trial. No argument, however subtle, could perplex His reason; no solicitation, however powerful, could seduce His affections. Satan exhausted his arts against Him in vain." To which we may add: He touched the leper, but was uncontaminated. He came into contact with death, but remained undefiled. He bare our sins in His own body on the tree, yet it was the "Holy One," unsullied, that was laid in the grave (Ps. 16:10).

4. THE MEDIATOR MUST BE MASTER OF HIMSELF The one whose work it is to reconcile two parties at variance must not be under personal obligations to either. None could offer a satisfaction to law if he himself owed a debt unto it. A mediator must be independent, having full power over himself, possessing complete right to act on the part of others. Those who are subject to the authority of another cannot dispose of themselves and their services without his consent. Now angels and men are the absolute property of their Creator, and must wait His command before they may venture to engage in any enterprise not comprehended in the original law of their nature. The life of man is God's gift, and must not be thrown away nor surrendered, no matter what good might be anticipated from the sacrifice, without the direct permission of the Giver. In a word, a Mediator between God and men must have full power over His own life, to lay it down and take it again. "It is not enough that the substitute be innocent, is free from the claims of the law for which he gives satisfaction to others. He may be under obligations to another law, the fulfillment of whose demand may render it impossible to occupy the place of surety. His whole time and energies may be thus, as it were, previously engaged, so as to put it out of his power to make a transfer of any part of them for the behalf of others. This is, indeed, the case with all creatures. Whatever service they are capable of performing, they owe originally and necessarily to God. They are, from their very nature, incapable of meriting for themselves, much less for others. The right of self-disposal belongs not to creatures. Themselves and all that pertains to them, are the property of Him who made and preserves the same. They are under law to God. They are not under the covenant which God made with man, to be sure; but the law under which they exist demands all their energies, it has a claim upon them for the full amount of the service which they are capable of performing, and thus denies them all right of giving satisfaction to another law, in behalf of a different order of creatures" (Dr. W. Symington).

5. THE MEDIATOR MUST ACT VOLUNTARILY This is so self-evident it should need no arguing. Without this qualification, all others would be worthless. Let an appointed mediator be ever so dignified in his person, let him be most intimately related to man, let him be entirely free from all moral contamination, let him be completely at his own disposal; yet, it is manifest that, unless he choose actually to dispose of himself for the good of others, no validity could attach to what he did. Vicarious satisfaction can never be compulsory: willingness enters into its very essence. To compel one to suffer for another would be the height of

injustice. Moreover, God will not accept any sacrifice which is reluctantly offered to Him: the heart must be in it: "My son, give me thine heart" (Prov. 23:26) is His first request from His children, for when He has that, He has everything. Inexpressibly blessed is it to observe how plainly and how frequently this very element is seen in the great Mediator. To the proposal in the eternal covenant He gave His cheerful consent: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Ps. 40:7, 8). In all that He did to make atonement for sin, the Lord Jesus manifested no degree of reluctance. His meat was to do the Father's will (John 4:34). He was "led [not "driven"] as a lamb to the slaughter" (Acts 8:32); He "gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair" (Isa. 50:6). "He poured out His soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12); He "gave up the spirit" (John 19:30). Let the interested reader turn to the Song of Solomon and behold how blessedly He is there represented as "leaping" and "skipping" over the mountains of separation as He hastens to His people!

6. THE MEDIATOR MUST BE FEDERALLY UNITED TO HIS PEOPLE

In his defense of the Satisfaction of Christ, Turretin pointed out how that there are three kinds of union known to us in human relations which justifies the imputation of sin one to another; natural, as between a father and his child; moral and political, as between a king and his subjects; voluntary, as between friends, or between an arraigned criminal and his sponsor. But the union of Christ with His people rests on far stronger ground than any of these considered alone. It was voluntary on His part, for He spontaneously assumed all the obligations He bore. But it was also a covenant ordinance, decreed by the three Divine persons in counsel, whose behests are alone the foundation of all law, all rights, and of all obligations. "The Scriptures plainly teach that God has established between Christ and His people a union sui-generis, transcending all earthly analogies in its intimacy of fellowship and reciprocal co-partnership both federal and vital" (Dr. C. Hodge). The mediatorial position assumed by Christ and the redemptive work which He performed cannot be rightly understood till they are viewed in connection with the Everlasting Covenant. It is not difficult to see that the death on the Cross was only made possible for the Son of God by His becoming Man. But we need to go farther back and ask, What was the relation between Christ and His people that made it meet for Him to become incarnate and die for them? It is not enough to say that He was their Surety, and Substitute. True, blessedly true, He wrought and suffered for them because He was their Surety to the offended Law-giver and Judge. But what rendered it proper that He should occupy such a place? No satisfactory answer can be given till we go right back to the counsels of the Godhead. Covenant oneness accounts for all, vindicates all, explains all. Christ was substituted for His people because He was and is one with them—identified with us and we with Him; not merely as decreed by the sovereign authority of the Godhead, but as covenanted between the eternal Father and the eternal Son. Christ "bore the sins of many" because in His covenant identification with them, their sins became sinlessly but truly His sins; and unto the sons and daughters of the covenant, the Father imputes the righteousness of His Son, because, in their covenant oneness with Him, His righteousness is undeservedly but truly their own righteousness. This alone explains all Christ's history as the incarnate Son of God; all His interposition as the Savior of His people; and it places the career of Christ on earth in its true relation to the eternal purpose of God. In its completeness, as bearing on the covenant-clients as well as the covenant-Head, it is the formal instrument by which faith comes into sure possession of Christ Himself and the benefits of redemption. Christ is expressly denominated "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), and therefore are we told that the first Adam was "the figure of Him that was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Adam was a "figure" of Christ in quite a number of ways, but supremely in this, that he stood as the federal head of a race. God entered into a covenant with him (Hosea 6:6, margin), and therefore he stood and fell as the legal representative of all his family: when he sinned, they sinned; when he died, they died (Rom. 5:12-19). So was it with the "last Adam": He stood as the covenant Head and federal Representative of all His people, being legally one with them, so that He assumed and discharged

all their responsibilities. The birth of Christ was the begun manifestation of the eternal union between Him and His people. In the Covenant, Christ had said to the Father, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me" (Hebrews 2:12, 13). Most blessedly is this explained in what immediately follows: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same," and therefore "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Federation is the root of this amazing mercy, covenant — identification is the key which explains it. Christ came not to strangers, but to "brethren"; He came here not to procure a people for Himself, but to secure a people already His (Eph. 1:4; Matthew 1:21). Since such a union has existed between Christ and His people from all eternity, it inevitably followed that, when He came to earth, He must bear their sins, and now that He has gone to heaven they must be clothed (Isa. 61:10) with all the rewardableness of His perfect obedience. This is the strongest buttress of all in the walls of Truth, yet the one which has been most frequently assailed by its enemies. Men have argued that the punishment of the Innocent as though He were guilty was an outrage upon justice. In the human realm, to punish a man for something of which he is neither responsible nor guilty, is, beyond question, unjust. But this principle did not apply to Christ, for He had voluntarily identified Himself with His people in such an intimate way that it could be said, "For both He that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one" (Heb. 2:11). When we say that the union between Christ and His people is a federal one, we mean that it is of such a nature as to involve an identification of legal relations and reciprocal obligations and rights: "By the obedience of One shall many be made [legally constituted] righteous" (Rom. 5:19). God's elect were "chosen in Christ" (Ephesians 1:4). They are "created in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:10). They were circumcised in Him (Colossians 2:11). They are "made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5: 21). In view of this ineffable union, Scripture does not hesitate to say, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 4:30).

7. THE MEDIATOR MUST BE DIVINE Think of the work the Mediator had to perform. He was to restore to Divine favor those who were under the curse. He had to render unto the law an obedience which one created sinless (Adam) had failed to perform. He was required to present unto God a satisfaction possessing infinite merits, which procured infinite blessings for His people. This a finite creature could not do. He was to endure the full weight of God's outpoured wrath upon all the sins of His people, as they were concentrated upon the Surety. He was to vanquish the Devil, so as to deliver his captives. He was to overcome sin, so that its sting was destroyed. He was to swallow up death and bestow eternal life on all those the Father had given him. Finally, He was to give the Holy Spirit unto His people, who would apply to them the redemption purchased. Who but a Divine person was competent for such an undertaking? Again; think of what has been effected by the Mediator's work. It has restored God's people to true liberty (Gal. 5:1). Now as Witsius rightly pointed out, if any mere creature, however exalted, had redeemed us, we should have become the personal property of that creature, for he who sets us free makes a purchase of us for his possession (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). But it is a manifest contradiction to be freed and be free, and yet at the same time be the property of any creature, for true liberty consists in subjection alone. Thus, our Lord says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8: 36). Again; for the redeemed to glory in anyone as their Savior, to say to Him, thou art our Lord, to render to Him adoring homage, is an honor to which no mere creature could have the slightest claim. Thus, the Mediator must be a Divine person. "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Why? In the first place, those typical sacrifices could not, in the nature of them, magnify the precepts of the law: they were totally incapable of rendering that perfect obedience which was required. Nor, secondly, could they endure the full penalty of the law: "Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof for a burnt offering" (Isa. 40:16). The fires of God's wrath had utterly annihilated the

cattle upon a thousand hills, and would still wait for something else to consume. Therefore did God "lay help upon one that is mighty" (Ps. 89:19). Christ was able not only to perfectly keep the law, but to suffer the full extent of its unabated curse. It is "the altar that sanctifieth the gift" (Matthew 23:19), the reference being to the type of Exodus 29:37: "it shall be an altar most holy; whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy." Upon this Dr. T. Ridgley (1815) well said, "From whence it is inferred, that the altar was more holy than the gift which was laid upon it, and it signifies, that the altar on which Christ was offered, added an excellency to His offering. Now nothing could be said to do so, but His divine nature's being personally united to His humanity, which rendered it infinitely valuable." For this reason, the mercy seat was made not of wood, but of "pure gold" (Ex. 25:17). How often does the Holy Spirit give supreme emphasis to this fact. Before He tells us in Hebrews 1 that Christ has "by himself purged our sins," He first presents this vicarious Sufferer as God's "Son," the "Heir of all things" the "brightness of God's glory," yea, the "express image of his person"! So in Philippians 2, the One who "humbled himself and became obedient unto death" is first set before us as Him who subsisted "in the form of God," and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." So again in Colossians 1 He is described as the Creator of all things (v. 16), ere we read of the peace which He made by the blood of His Cross. It is because Christ was who He was which gave an infinite value to what He did. We close this somewhat lengthy chapter with the concluding words of Dr. Symington on this enthralling subject: "From the perfection of His atonement, arising out of the circumstances specified above, does it proceed, that He makes intercession for us within the veil of the upper sanctuary, that He dispenses with a munificent hand the gifts of His purchase and causes the prey of a great spoil to be divided. And pardon and peace, redemption and holiness, eternal glory and bliss are, among the rich fruits of the royal and triumphal conquest He achieved, when by His infinitely meritorious death, He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly. With the most entire confidence, then, may the needy sinner, smitten with the deepest sense of conscious unworthiness, rely for salvation on this all-sufficient atonement."

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