

SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

(NOTE FROM D. HARVEY-A copy of the following letter was sent to me on 12-2-96)

Dear Pastor Greg,

I want to finish our discussion begun tonight on substitution to share with you my view in brief and encourage you to think through this whole subject before more publishing and preaching on the atonement. I think that you could reap a great harvest through its preaching. You have opportunities that few of us have. But few men speak on the atonement beyond a peripheral allusion to it, and when they do, they speak of the payment view, which makes God a Scrooge and a tyrant. So maybe it's best that speak on other topics.

I do believe in a vicarious atonement in the following ways. I am not sure why you questioned my view. And you seem to down play the substitution element in your view. I hope in this short letter to outline the moral government view, as you find elements that you admire in Finney.

Christ's death was a 3-fold substitution:

- Person--Christ suffered, not the sinner
- Kind--Grief and agony over man's sins, not the torment of remorse, shame, and a guilty conscience
- Amount--3 to 6 hours (endured in His humanity), not eternally

I do NOT believe in substitution in the following ways: that Christ was punished instead of me, that He endured the wrath of the Father for me, that He paid the penalty for my sin, that He obeyed instead of my obeying, or that His righteousness (personal character) is regarded as mine by the Father.

It seems that many who believe in a literal payment by Christ consider those who don't as rejecting the substitutionary atonement. This is unfair. I do believe that Christ died for (on behalf of) sinners, that He became a sin offering, that I may become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3), that it would have been wrong of God to forgive us without the atonement (Rom. 3:21-25).

Albert Barnes was good on the three-fold substitution. He defined the atonement as "an arrangement by which the literal infliction of the penalty due to sin may be avoided; it is something which may be substituted in the place of punishment; it is that which will answer the same end which would be secured by the literal infliction of the penalty of the law." It must show the Lawgiver's regard for the value of the law and the evil of disobedience of the law.

I believe that:

- No one was saved at the historical cross (except the thief).
- Christ died for all people in the same sense.
- The Atonement is not causal in anyone's salvation, but it is one condition of my salvation, repentance and faith are the others.
- The atonement satisfies public justice, not retributive justice.
- The atonement was not for God alone (payment), or for man alone (moral influence), but for both in relationship.

Gordon Olson was so good on this and has helped me and others so much in YWAM and Agape Force, etc., in the 1960's and 1970's. On page 51 of *The Kindness of God Our Saviour*, he sums up the first part of his book by saying: "After man's rebellion and persistence therein, such is the love and long-suffering of the Godhead that They are free from vindictiveness and are kindly disposed toward man." The problems that God has with forgiveness are governmental, not personal. I summarize below:

The objective to be achieved in man's reconciliation is:

The happy God-man relationship of love and kindness must be restored, and the happy man-to-man relationship of love and kindness must also be restored.

What must be accomplished by the means of reconciliation?

- The guilt of past sin must be forgiven.
- The selfish purpose of life must be terminated.
- The inner defilement of sin must be remedied.
- The transformed life must be sustained.
- Preparation for heaven can only be made in this present life.

What are the problems to be overcome by means of reconciliation?

- God must be just to His moral government--in providing such an effective deterrent to sin, that the enforcement of moral government shall not in any way be weakened when free pardon is extended to the guilty under certain conditions.
- God must be just to Himself as Moral Governor--in revealing the unspeakable grief and extreme displeasure that the Godhead have experienced because of man's rebellions against a loving rulership and his energetic persistence in sin.
- God must be just to man's hypocrisy--in destroying all pride and bringing man to recognize the truth of his moral relations and his profound guilt of his sin as deserving of eternal punishment.
- God must be just to man's moral freedom--in providing a means to be used by the Holy Spirit in purifying the innermost being of the repentant sinner and in inducing him to live a new spiritual life through faith.

On page 88, he begins to show how these problems were overcome by the advent and atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have writings by President Edwards, Barnes, Beman, Burge, Olson and Finney on this--all express the moral government or public justice view. Also, Herald Press publishes

John Driver's Understanding the Atonement for the Mission of the Church. He avoids an analysis of the atonement (but rejects payment and punishment), rather admonishing ministers to have a full-orbed presentation of the 10 motifs or images of its meaning as used in the New Testament.

Thanks for all that you have given to me. I hope I have made my view clear, whether or not it is useful to you. The whole subject of the death of Christ and the atonement is the greatest subject in all the world and what I understand as the heart of apostolic preaching.

Your friend
Jeff Paul