


FULL ATONEMENT

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THE GAUNTLET

Let me begin by breaching all the rules of writing and argument and theology by simply stating that ***“It is finished” means that the cross put an end to the crisis of judgment for the saints of God and brought life and immortality to light.***

Immortality for the people of God is guaranteed in the cross. All that the cross won for us who with full repentance and true faith are “in Christ” by divine grace and in accordance with His purpose horizoned in Christ is established through ***the mercy seat*** of Calvary.

This proposition now stands at the head of an important discourse as a footnote to the message of the cross and Christ’s ***complete atonement*** for us which itself throughout every era since the gospel of the cross was first announced by Christ and proclaimed by the apostles has been the unique and once for all basis of man’s redemption.

THE PURPOSE COUNSEL AND DECREES OF GOD

COMMENTATORS DO NOT LACK IDEAS.

There are those who call for a further precipitation of wrath in Christ and would have our Lord catapulted into further suffering in the pains of hell. This has not a scintilla of evidence derived from the bible and does evangelicalism great harm. There are those who cast their notions into hymnology to promulgate the idea that God the Father flung thunderbolts of anger and rage at Christ on the cross to demonstrate His commuted anger at sinners. This is strange and does not accord with the nature of what happened at Calvary. These ideas have more in common with Dante and Greek mythology than with the atonement of Christ. The finality of atoning sacrifice and deepest awe of divine justice and mercy ever known in history acting in two directions at one and the same time through Christ’s death and redeeming blood to reconcile man to God and to satisfy the justice of a holy God is what we are looking at when we consider Calvary.

DESCRIPTION NO.1

Getting to the bottom of the grandeur and true significance of the atonement is like describing the origins of the universe. The “Big Bang” is comparable to the wrath of God-manifestly destructive and yet it is proposed as the source of creation itself much as the other (divine wrath) is proposed as the quixotic element that combines with justice to produce redemption. Does scripture not plainly say that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life?” “It was love that drew salvation’s plan and love that brought it down to man—Oh the mighty gulf that God did span—at Calvary!

Wayne Grudem is a scholar of some repute whose interpretation of “propitiation” is *“a sacrifice that bears God’s wrath to the end and in so doing changes God’s wrath towards us into favour”* (Grudem “Atonement” 254). That is to say that at the 6th hour or thereabouts God poured out His fierce wrath at the cross and at some point or when it was spent or waived at the 9th the curtain was rent in two. That is manifestly not the case. During the initial hours (3rd to 6th) on the cross the Saviour acted in union with the Father as the *Dabar* or mighty word on the behalf of sinners “Father forgive

them” and “Today you will be with me” in paradise. Grace along with redemption and reconciliation and satisfaction were immediate at the cross minutes into the passion at Calvary and being endorsed by a loving heavenly Father immediately. A *basis of mercy* was gloriously in place to the satisfaction of the Father and by the obedience of the Son. The 3rd word “Mother behold your son, Son behold your mother” followed and then in order by “I thirst”, “Why hast Thou forsaken me”, “It is finished” and “Into thy hands I commend my Spirit”. At the passing of a worldwide 3 hour darkness came the cry of dereliction.

Wayne Grudem’s statement on guilt transfer at the cross is that “God thought of sin as belonging to Christ so *that was the reality*. This is a Cartesian idea and it derives from the thinking of Louis Berkhof and traces its heredity back to Hodge.

Grudem’s approach portrays four sorts of pain which he presents in combination as fully descriptive of the act of atonement.

- (a) The well recognised excruciating pain associated with crucifixion
- (b) The psychological pain of bearing guilt for our sin. His texts to demonstrate this are Isa.53.6 & 12 with John1.29, 2Cor.5.21 Gal.3.13 and 1Peter2.24.
- (c) Abandonment by God the Father which is expressed in Matt.27.46 and
- (d) Bearing the wrath of God. Grudem relies heavily on the argument of Leon Morris centring on Romans 1.20-2.11 which with the great bulk of other Old and New Testament scriptures speak specifically of God’s wrath on the wicked executed by death disaster or apocalyptic judgment. Is not *death* the penalty of sin? Is not the second death the judgment awaiting the unrepentant?

Grudem quotes Hebrews 2.17, 1John2.2 & 4.10 and cites “a sacrifice (Christ’s) that turns away the wrath of God” (ἱλασμος) as that which makes God propitious toward us. Grudem does say that “Christ died as a propitiation for our sins” but neither he nor any of the other theologians will emphasise or explain how Christ suffered “wrath” from the Father saving that he was allowed to face the pains of death and such anguish as it might be fairly argued proceeded from the breaking of His heart. Grudem ostensible demurs from “He ascended into hell” on the basis that the creedal formulae was only formalised in 650AD

DESCRIPTION NO.2

Louis Berkhof summarising Hodge says “Strictly speaking, then, the guilt of sin as *liability to punishment* was imputed to Christ and this could be transferred, because it (guilt) did not inhere in the person of the sinner, but was something objective.”(Berkhof “Systematic theology” P.377). He earlier sets out the vicarious atonement of Christ in these words “The guilt of sinners was imputed and their punishment transferred to Christ” (P.376). As to whether guilt on account of conscience is inherent in the sinner and inalienable is one issue but that it cannot be cut from man’s conscience and pasted on that of the Lord is so self-evident that Berkhof has to re-word “guilt”. There is absolutely no requirement to engage in all this theological jugglery. *Guilt* is being confused with *sin* which is the substantive issue. Guilt advises of sin but sin itself has to be dealt with and when sin is covered (*kippur*) by atoning blood then *the accidens* or signal fades out amid the joy of forgiveness. The Old Testament offerings have what is called a “sin offering” but when it was made it had no cure for the conscience nor did it deal with the issue of guilt (Hebrews 10.1-14). The signals of conscience continued unabated until the once for all offering of Christ.

DESCRIPTION NO.3

J.I.Packer in his 1973 lecture in Tyndale House Cambridge argued for a distinct emphasis on *substitution* in our understanding of the death of Christ and for “a *specific penal frame of reference*” in that connection. This account grounds man’s plight in sin and as a sinner he falls under judgment. For man’s sin Christ in dying offered “satisfaction” for sins. This may be taken as the “homage” of death or enduring the “*Godforsakenness*” of hell or sympathetic identification. Packer speaks of Christ as dealing with us on behalf of the Father bestowing forgiveness and dealing with the Father on our behalf offering Himself as satisfaction. Forgiveness is implemented in a sense by resurrection. There is no indication that Christ went to hell on the cross or that He was further punished in hell thereafter. The “Why do I remain” cry was addressed to the Father because of the prolonged suffering in face of the Gethsemane prayer “Let this cup pass quickly”. It notably obtained an immediate response. The veil was rent and His heart was broken.

DESCRIPTION NO.4

Donald Guthrie writing on “The saving work of Christ” in “New Testament Theology” P448 states “Jesus recognised that his death would be vicarious in the sense that He was doing something in the place of others. Moreover the death was conceived as a sacrifice with special New Covenant links and it ratified the New Covenant in the same way as sacrificial blood ratified the old. There is no doubt that Jesus regarded himself *as a substitute* in a sense reminiscent of Isaiah’s suffering servant.

Guthrie spreads his treatment of propitiation out dealing with it in separate lots within each NT book. His Johannine Epistles bring us to his treatment of “expiation”(though he prefers “propitiation” Earlier (in P.469 Guthrie states that “expiation relates to sin whilst propitiation relates to God. Expiation allows for the removal of the consequences of sin and propitiation is an act which enables God to receive the sinner.” Guthrie brushes aside C.H.Dodd’s idea of wrath as simply “an inevitable process of cause and effect in the universe” and helpfully defines God’s wrath (ORGE) as more settled whilst His anger (THUMOS) is more passionate –as a strong emotion.

So when Paul speaks of propitiation he has in mind some way to remove wrath. What Christ did was a substitutionary act by which God shows that His anger is turned away, so that men are now freed to come into a new relationship with Him.

Guthrie further develops his position in recognition that propitiation involves more than the cancellation of guilt. He then turns to 1 John4.10 with something of the air of a surprise proclaiming that “love (the antithesis of anger) is the motive force that provides the expiation”

If only Guthrie made another obvious link and recognised the connection of *the mercy seat and expiation* he would be on to a winner. Love’s mercy seat enabled by the blood of the cross sets aside the wrath of God. The cross is a provision of love and the death of Christ-nothing more and nothing less - is the basis of sin’s remission in those who repent and believe. Wrath is not the portion of the obedient.

THE FOUR PAINS THEOLOGIANS DIAGNOSE AT THE CROSS

The manner in which theologians act in respect of the cross is somewhat similar to the way surgeons act in Rembrandt's picture of a primitive operation. There may appear to be great proficiency in their handling of the issue of atonement and yet the mystery of the suffering of our Lord is not so readily separated into a neat lot of four as might seem to be the case.

Did the pain of Christ's crucifixion do it? Did the highly suppositional anguish of psychological guilt Christ may have endured for our sin do it? Did the divine abandonment do it? Did the austerity of the wrath of God do it? These may be thought of as the penalty-but truly that penalty is Christ bearing the curse and **dying vicariously** on the cross "For cursed is everyone that **dies** on a tree".

We have to look at it a totally different way and factor in the joy that Christ had set before Him. We have to acknowledge *the eternal purpose* of the Father to uphold divine justice and grant the nations as an inheritance to the Son in the form of the church and then the eschatological kingdom that overflows beyond the church age. The willingness of Christ to do what He came to do and act as an obedient servant on behalf of God and man did it. The blood he willingly shed did it. The key is that God set forth Christ as a "mercy seat" not that God unleashed other sinister and horrendous shafts of wrath at the cross-that is not of the *esse* or *bene esse*. **The death of the lamb of God** on the cross is enough-it was enough to satisfy the justice of God and it is enough to save you and me.

WHAT OF THE DERELICTION CRY?

But you say "What of the cry of dereliction?" Indeed-lets deal with that thoroughly. I watched one I deeply love in a profound silence not long since. Her mind was torn between conflicting loves as to how she should reconcile both. She sat utterly speechless and silent. God loved the world and God loved His Son. The silence of 3 hours in the heavens was awesome. It is reflected in the Greek word *εγκαταλειπω* "Forsaken" which means "**to leave a child behind**". It makes us think back to the time when the child Jesus was left behind in the temple. His earthly parents appeared to pursue their way without him. It seemed a dereliction of duty. We shall look presently at the seven words from the cross to look for an answer. The Aramaic equivalent "sabachthani" as distinct from "azerathani" (Psalm22) cries against prolonged suffering "Why do I remain?" although the acute pain preceding death craved and appealed to the Father's sensitive heart "Why leave me?" Here as in Gethsemane our Saviour and the "proper" man truly suffered and in His humanity with the words of His human forefather He made His final appeal

THE CROSS-NOT A GAMBLE BUT A VICTORY

God in His holiness could not negotiate with the world (in its sin) to save His Son. God's purpose moved by the total obedience and substitutionary death of His Son fulfilling the penal demands of His justice to save those who looked by faith to Him in the world He loved. This was no gamble-it was prepared from eternity. It required no special display of wrath-but it needed unimaginable self restraint and presented unprecedented opportunity of what Peter calls "return of reviling" which would at once have nullified the mighty enterprise-but the majesty and holiness of Father and Son executed an atonement or reconciliation like no other. The Son satisfied the Father and the Father who had already given all judgment to the Son (John5.22) was to pour into the lap of His beloved the souls of the redeemed in a Pentecostal outpouring that has run like a fire in heather till this very day.

MORIAH AND CALVARY

Compare the story of Abraham's offering up of Isaac. Abraham came within a whisker of having to demand of God that He raise Isaac from the dead. God hastily deterred Abraham. The matter of substitution is well illustrated in that Moriah incident but it would have been fundamentally inconsequential to carry on. Obedience alone was not enough to alter the course of humanity. The death of Isaac would not change mankind. The offering had not such holiness as could atone for sin nor could it represent God to bring forgiveness to man. Abraham didn't really know what his act prefigured but he learned to love God with all his heart. God knew what the outcome of Calvary would be and He had planned that His own Son would banish the curse and bring life and immortality to light in the gospel and release power which would bring new light to the world, save souls and banish guilt, rend the veil, open paradise and raise the dead.

THE SEVEN WORDS

"Today in Paradise" – these were good words indeed for the thief to hear in the course of a long lingering death. Jesus brought him consolation from the heart of God. **"Father forgive them"** – good words for men who certainly did not know the enormity of their act in crucifying Christ. They might recall them later and find the benefits that the crucified could bestow. **"Mother, behold your son"** – more consolation from the unlikelyst of places - from the accursed tree. This central question recalls "the cup" of Gethsemane and the awesome cups of previous history- Nebuchadnezzar's cup - the cup in Benjamin's sack. This was the most sin laden cup ever offered to a man on earth and it was the cup of Israel's Messiah and the world's Saviour. Jesus was about to drink its last dregs. His historic cry as His heart was breaking was **"Eloi, Eloi, Sabachthani"** This was the "will of God" for our salvation and we need look no further for the utmost heights of divine demands of justice or the utmost provisions of mercy and love. He was forsaken; we are adopted. He was anguished we are at peace. He was smitten, we are healed. He died and we were given life.

God will not justice twice demand
First at my bleeding surety's hand
and then again at mine.

Then in quick succession Christ uttered more words. He cried out **"I thirst"** – it seemed to those around to be a call for Elijah. Our Lord was experiencing the throes of death but He had an unquenchable thirst for an act of kindness and a release to glory. He continued with powerful voice **"It is finished"** or "it is paid"-the penalty of sin was paid in His all atoning death. Why need we look elsewhere? This is our discharge from the thrall of sin and our ground of forgiveness. There was nothing left to do. The will of God was complete-the rocks rent-the dead were raised-the veil was torn in two. The silence of heaven was broken as the golden bowl was broken and the pitcher at the fountain." Again for the ears of the Father Christ spoke his last **"Into thy hands I commend my Spirit"**. The secret of the atonement and reconciliation and satisfaction and redemption is Jesus Christ - the Father's only Son whose blood and mercy seat God set forth for our salvation. We may be saved from wrath crisis and judgment through him but we are saved by grace through faith which is the gift of God and we are redeemed to God because He spared not his own Son but delivered Him up for us all-sacrificially and that we might share His righteousness and see the glory that He had with the Father before the world was.

EDWARD DENNEY ON THE ATONEMENT

Now let us look at the “unprocessed Greek” references to the “Atonement” in a study of James Denney (onetime principal of the United Free Church College Glasgow) by that name. The question is “What did Denney say about the cross in that connection?”

1. Denney quotes the Westcott & Hort Greek NT δει of Matthew 1\6.21 affirming a necessity larger than mere historical circumstance of man. Here is necessary death, necessary pain and necessary resurrection to complete atonement.
2. Where Mark states “He gave his soul to death” (8.34) Denney links it with Isaiah 53.12 and states that “the idea of legal satisfaction was there to”. That is to say that the substitution of the person of Christ was full satisfaction for our forgiveness.
3. Denney quotes Robertson Smith who insists on the principle “All sacrifice is atoning”. Denney goes on to argue from 1 Corinthians 15.3 that “My blood of the covenant” as in Mathews 26.28 is blood shed for the “remission of sin”.
4. Denney criticises Calvin Institutes 2.16.10 “Jesus endured torments of a lost man”. The “agony” is stated to *be “deadly fear”* “out of proportion to what man could do” Denney has it that this is not just a historical religious event particular to the moment but a dogmatico-religious experience related “with a meaning for eternity”. I would counter that the experience of Gethsemane was a battle for souls and a struggle not just for Jesus’ own life but related to the eternal life of the redeemed. It was a struggle for His and our highest interests - “To seek and save the lost”. The nature of our Lord’s perfect humanity was perfectly tested by experience. He Himself said “The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”. Peter knew that as did all the disciples and the apostle Paul besides. This did not escape our Lord. Christ’s passion had begun and the battle was joined with no retreat in view and no capitulation only victory envisaged and gloriously achieved.

GUILTY VILE AND HELPLESS WE
SPOTLESS LAMB OF GOD WAS HE;
FULL ATONEMENT, CAN IT BE?
HALLELUJAH, WHAT A SAVIOUR!
P.P.BLISS

FINIS