


ATONEMENT & OUR HIGH PRIEST

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CALVIN'S THEORY IN BRIEF

CONFIRMED AT DORDT

For Calvin, this also required drawing on Augustine's earlier theory of predestination. Additionally, in rejecting the idea of penance, **Calvin shifted** from Aquinas' idea that satisfaction was penance (which focused on satisfaction as a change in humanity), **to the idea of satisfying God's wrath**. This ideological shift places the focus on a change in God, who is propitiated through Christ's death. The Calvinist understanding of the atonement and satisfaction is penal substitution: Christ is a substitute taking our punishment and thus **satisfying the demands of justice and appeasing God's wrath** so that God can justly show grace. Calvin states his position variously reducing it at one point to little more than obedience and intercession of Christ. His main contribution was to tie satisfaction to the elect.

Paul says God is just and justifier because Christ is who He is – the one ordained as “mercy seat” or propitiation by blood and this relates to the instrument of faith in His atoning death. This mercy was to declare the shared righteousness of God for the passing over of bygone sins. Paul is linking the mercy seat to the idea of “Passover” in the armistice or longsuffering of God aimed at the present display (in Paul’s day & since) of righteousness shared out of faith in Jesus. Paul tells the Romans that a long rebellion has come to the issue of offered peace and right standing. It is not just for Jews in Egypt but all who would seek Christ in the world. Propitiation is nothing other than the shedding of Christ’s blood for us.

COMMENT OF JOHN STOTT

John Stott has stressed stressed that **this must be understood not as the Son placating the Father**, but rather in Trinitarian terms of the Godhead initiating and carrying out the atonement, motivated by a

desire to save humanity. Thus the key distinction of penal substitution is the idea that **restitution is made through punishment**.

Hence, for Calvin, one is saved by becoming united to Christ through faith. At the point of becoming united with Christ through faith, one receives all the benefits of the atonement. However, because Christ paid for sins when he died, it is not possible for those for whom he died to *fail* to receive the benefits: the saved are *predestined* to believe,

COMMENT

The key is punishment or ransom or justice satisfied and the wrath of God represented by the curse annulled. The curse upon as in Genesis 3 17-19 has incorporated within it the particular pains and strains of food production for sustaining life and ultimately death (and its long future history of attendant afflictions because of sin). Man is described as “dust” i.e. not naturally eternal. The curse was pending before the fall and patent at the fall. As Solomon said “Man is born to death as the sparks fly upward” but the ultimate judgment of the second death brings about the situation where “dying man surely dies”.

MY POSITION

I believe what the scriptures as originally given and by comparison teach under the Holy Spirit of God and to that I yield my conscience.

I am not Docetist. Christ really suffered in his human flesh heart and mind. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was a man of or fitted for sorrows and yet he felt every nail-blow and every insult and both were terrible-yet when reviled he reviled not again and when he suffered he threatened not

I am not a Socinian I believe that the death of Christ satisfied **Divine justice** and when in obedience He died the accursed death of the cross he satisfied the **Holy** Father on all counts. I believe He died to provide truce from and security against the enmity and wrath of God and of the Lamb for all who would believe.

I am not Patropassian. As Isaiah said God was grieved or sick when he in the divine council outworked his Son was put to grief. This does not mean God suffered as in the flesh man suffers but that God loved his son and as we might say was moved with compassion and love because God is love.

I believe in penal substitution I believe the wages of sin is death and that Christ paid for the sins of “many” as Paul said in Romans 5. 15, 19. *How many* I leave to God but hold a brief for John 3.16 where we read “God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”. I believe further that Christ was in his person the propitiation or substitute for sin and that in His death or shedding of His precious blood that penalty was paid.

I am not a Universalist Scripture speaks of the wrath of God which has been prefigured temporally in the flood and a Sodom but will be dispensed in judgment at the Great White Throne

I believe that God is just and the justifier This entails absolute belief in the forensic of imputed righteousness and the judicial conferring of standing only through faith and not by works of righteousness which we have done.

I believe the whole doctrine of the Nicene Creed

I believe the Apostles’ Creed

I believe the Westminster Statement. "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Him self hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father" (Ch. viii. sect. v.)

I believe in limited atonement but state it in Pauline terms “Christ died for the many”. I believe God foreknew and pre-horizoned and in every age has those who are His yet I believe He did not disable man’s faculties at the fall and through the cross every obstacle to faith is removed excepting the will or capacity to obey or resist the Holy Spirit. I do not believe in universalism. I believe the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is efficacious for all who will believe and are known to God as His own. *Please note that Lutherans do not believe in limited atonement or in unconditional perseverance.* I consent to both these doctrines – the first in the above terms.

I reject the dogma that Christ became a cursed sinner as Luther verging on blasphemy taught in his literal interpretation of Galatians interpreting the prophets in error

Gal. iii. 13

The prophets saw this in the Spirit, that Christ would be of all men the greatest robber, murderer, adulterer, thief, sacrilegious person, blasphemer, etc., than whom none greater ever was in the world, because He who is a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world now is not an innocent person, and without sin, is not the Son of God born of the Virgin *Martin Luther*

An explanation

First notice the use of “Not knowing sin”. It is not the absolute οὐ in Greek but the speculative or cognitive μη for our Lord knew the heart of man and was in one sense absolutely aware of sin and its consequence. He himself said that He came “Not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” Mt. 9.13, Mk 2.17, Luke 5.32. This means several things:-

(a) Our Lord did not observe sin insofar as he did not look up observe and ever feast his eyes on sin.

(b) He did not think judgmentally about sin so as to be continually passing sentence like the Pharisees though His awareness was greater. He had compassion on those who sinned and were out of the way.

(c) He did not once have carnal knowledge of or actual involvement in sinning in His person during His whole life.

Our Lord was perfect in devotion to the Father and purity, open accepting (receiving sinners) and sincere in attitude and sinlessly perfect.

HE BECAME SIN 2 Corinthians 5.21

There is no issue if the next word *ἁμαρτία* is taken to mean sin offering” But if it is demanded that the next word is actually **sin** there is a theological issue. If Paul had wanted to say “He became sin” he could plainly have done so using the Greek exactly as in the LXX 2 Kings 12.30 where it says the “word of God became sin” using the verb *ἐγένετο* with *εἰς ἁμαρτία* but Paul uses *ἐποίησαν* nor does he show a turning to sin by using *εἰς*. We have to conclude that he is not stating that our Lord became “sin” or that he became a sinner”.

(1) He represented sin

There are three options open to us. The first is somewhat scholastic. The verb is active and aorist and the expression in plain Greek reads “He created sin”. There obviously has to be a legal or special sense if the word sin is “sin” as generally understood though Calvinists are not infrequently accused of arguing that God is the author of sin. What then is the meaning? Let us study the words!

(a) **He made** It could mean (i) “Create” “Bring into existence” “inspire”(and in particular “to represent” as poetry does life so **He represented all sin” in His person** coming under the judgment of death) “invent” “cause” or (ii) in the abstract “to make a sacrifice...when connected to the next word understood in a special sense it would read perfectly well a sin offering. This is in line with the patristic understanding of the death of Christ.

(b) **Sin** (1) Various of the meanings as “missing the mark”, “failure”, “deprivation” make no sense in English without interpretation; but (2) according to Buttmann who took the meaning further back than any it is linked to the cognates **αμειρω αμερδω αμβροτος (αμβροσια)** with the significance “to take away the share” to “amerce” or to “lose” (sometimes of life). This meaning enables Paul’s expression to read **“He was amerced of the elixir or food” of His relationship with the Father-converse-God’s word – there was silence.** It appears to mean also “death” itself. This was utterly outside of God’s previous experience - extraneous to the very nature of the living God. This sense balances with the apodosis for he was amerced and we were endowed.

(c) **for us** In place of our becoming without the food and word of God and dying that death where there is no life word He died. The mystery inspires awe and worship. The spirit of Christ went to the Father and He visited Hell and many bodies arose subsequently and when He arose their spirits returned. But note that bodies were given through his death and before his resurrection (Matthew 27.53). The cross amerced him of his share as the righteous one and made him sins’ representative in dying that we might have a share in divine righteousness.(**δικαιοσυνη**). Notice the use of “**become**” – it means “to have life” and to have standing.

As to the much simpler interpretation “sin offering” if we render the Greek word **αμαρτια** into Hebrew and read the text of 2

Corinthians 5:21 in Hebrew when we read it in its best sense it renders **“He offered Him as a sin offering for us who knew no sin”**. Universally in the Mosaic ceremonials the words “sin” and “sin offering” are identical.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not accounting or reckoning their transgressions to them” and on His own behalf and by His action placing in our circle (as Christians) the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are empowered ambassadors on behalf of and on the part of Christ, according as and as if God in Christ is appealing or moving by his Spirit to appeal through us we beg a favour on Christ’s behalf **“Be reconciled to God”**. So the gospel presents divine favour and seeks the favour of men for what it offers. In the ministry of the gospel we are willing to be reduced to “beggars”. The specific reason that enforces this craving for the ear and heart of men is that **“He who (still) does not have any experience of sin or sinning for our sake created a sin offering.**

We need to understand that when the AV says *“God made Him to be sin”* where the verb “made” is active this does not mean that Christ was made “a sinner”. Luther used extravagant even blasphemous language in this connection-see above

(2) GREEK ETHICS AS A PRESUMED PAULINE CONTEXT

It is widely agreed to mean **“He made Him to be a sin offering”** under the Hebrew understanding as set out below. **For the Corinthians who knew Aristotle and his ethics the Gentile understanding would be that there was “sin” between that which was “unrighteous” and that which was “unfortunate”**.

Paul may well have been explaining the cross as much more than a simple misfortune and also denying that the death of Christ was simple injustice. It was “sin bearing” or an act involving *satisfaction for sin*.

(3) THINKING IN HEBREW PAUL’S EXPRESSION FAVOURS “SIN OFFERING” 100%

Read or understood as a Hebrew statement it would mean **“He made an offering (ASHAH) of Himself (ATHO) for *the* sin (LEHATTEATH) on our behalf in order that we might become and stay alive in His house belonging to or related to the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God.”** This

is the English transliteration of the Hebrew NT rendering of the Corinthian passage.

(4) CHRIST MUST REMAIN THE PURE LAMB- HE CANNOT BECOME WICKED FOR THE RECEIPT OF THE PUNISHMENT OF HELL

Returning to “He (God) has made Him (Christ) to be sin for us” we must eschew the tendency to adopt a “whipping boy” approach or endangerment to the person of Christ.

The verb is *ποιεω* and the noun is *αμαρτια*. The verb is not *εγενετο* “He became” and this is good. Had it been any combination of *γιννομαι* Christ would have become what He is not. He would have turned into Luther’s *wicked sinner* or become the “sin” of high Calvinists. As it is thankfully neither is possible to argue accurately from the grammar. Theologically if Jesus changed to being a “wicked sinner” deserving and attracting wrath upon the cross He could not have continued to be who He is - the perfect lamb of God. If He “became” something called sin or was “made to be” sin a missing verb would have to be substituted for *ποιεω* or *ποιεω* would have had to be changed from indicative to middle or passive voice and what theological implications could be drawn from such a caprice one boggles to imagine

(5) ROOT DEFINITION OF SIN & CONSIDERATION OF BEING MADE SIN ACCORDING TO THE MEANING OF THE ACTIVE VERB PAUL USES

Buttmann in his lexicon follows the meaning of “sin” further upstream than anyone. He makes the link between *αμαρτια* and *αμβροσια* between “missing” or being without the “elixir of God”. Sin is not about shooting arrows and missing a target although that is the meaning of the old English word. It is about a deprivation of what pagans called the “nectar of the Gods” or the “elixir of immortality”. In the case of our Lord who was put in exactly this position being deprived during the throes of His passion of any word to annul from heaven amidst that agony – this deepest humiliation and highest obedience is described well by Paul in Philippians 2. This ultimate in self-emptying had never before touched the life of God. Only Jesus knew that experience – it has no equivalent in the universe of self abnegation. It was most as Isaiah describes it “most grievous”.

As to the root meanings of (*ποιεω*) if we grant that against all the rules of grammar “made sin” or made to be “without the sustainment of the life of God” is the intended meaning of the apostle; there are three-
1. The external effect

2. The successful effect
3. The continuous effect.

First, God who is a Spirit might send His Son in the flesh when our Lord the **PROPER MAN** on the cross went through an experience absolutely **external** to Himself in being stripped of heavenly things that had nourished Him eternally and since His incarnation. This would be an experience external or strange, grievous and private to our Lord and not susceptible of explanation in the absolute sense. Mysterious and unprecedented things might happen within this divine foray of care for the creature.

Second, He might be “made sin” in that as the “**MEDIATOR**” between God and man in this deepest obedience and most radical identification with Man – though still possessing deity He dealt with sin and destroyed sin’s power. This is the successful effect of that unique obedience.

The third effect might take us to the continuous nature of the benefits which flow in the form of the “elixir” of God and of immortality out of the Lord’s great work of love. If sin is the want of the elixir in ancient definition Christ might die that we might live as He said “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abides alone-but if it die it brings forth much fruit”. Every day in every nation through every age the benefits of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ flow backwards and forwards as (AMBROSIAL) **MEDICINE** for all our souls diseases (the benefits of God’s grace) into a myriad lives who look in faith and repentance to the Saviour. Christ lost the elixir of life as a human being that human beings might receive it-the idea is attractive. It is everywhere plain from the writings of the Apostles that through Jesus’ death there is released life and power which brings the very life of God into the soul of man. Christ’s death is not only the basis of justification – it is also the source of our life. Jesus said “Unless a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone but if it die it brings forth much fruit”. The travail of His soul was to justify many and as Isaiah said He brought forth *a posterity*. This new life is produced by the moving of the Spirit of God and the Word of Christ’s power and promise and it is the gift of God. To those who believe in Jesus as Lord. Sin existed

before the commandment as **rebellious disobedience** against a holy God in Eden where it first entered and its descriptor was the deprivation of spiritual life which was remedied at the cross by the **signal obedience** of our Lord Jesus Christ as the God given lamb and mercy seat – the one who satisfied divine justice and brought us to God by the shedding of His precious blood - thus saving us from the wrath to come. I am not arguing for the idea of becoming sin for one has to be linguistically a gymnast to support it.

CONCERNING THE PROPHET ISAIAH I UNDERSTAND THAT

(1) It is in no way necessary to interpret the “bruising” of Isa53.v5 where the text states “**He was bruised** for our iniquities” differently from the bruising of v10 “ where we read “And” or “But” “**it pleased the Lord to bruise Him**, he has caused Him to be wearied or become sick (even to the point of supplication)” **Brad Jersak** in his blog takes the second reference to be an additional “bruising” but the additional words in v.10 read in Hebrew “Therefore it pleased the Lord to bruise Him...when You will make His soul and offering for sin, He will see a seed and prolong His days and **the pleasure of the Lord** will go on with success or grow well by His hand”. (a) The first “pleasure” is that of the Father to “bruise” in declaring His Son just and for His sake justifying men and thus bring forth everlasting righteousness shared with man by imputation (cf. akd with xpj in Job 13.3”I desire to put a legal defense”, 33.32 “I desire to justify you” as here in Isa.53.10”. ***The Lord was pleased to have an answer in the sacrifice His beloved Son made for our justification***) (b) The second pleasure is that of the Son who immediately rejoiced in that He “succeeded” in atoning or completed the work the Father gave Him to do. This propitiation atonement and reconciliation was measured by His resurrection and its first fruits and by those born again of the Spirit - first the thief and shortly thereafter the 120 and after his ascension the 5000 and a never ending stream... The “bruising” was no surfeit of mysterious tribulation but the cross with the glorious just one never stooping to revile but becoming God’s perfect sin offering and satisfying divine justice. The

atonement is for ever a glorious manifestation of the length and depth to which **divine sorrowing love** will go.

(2) In Isaiah 53.6 the Father is said to have caused all our Iniquities to meet upon His Son. In a sense [qp speaks of “striking” or “killing” besides “lighting upon” or reaching Jesus on the cross. Better still we are to consider that “all the iniquities” of Israel and the world fall upon Christ at the cross. **The meeting in Jesus of all our sin is more than fortuitous** - because of who He was that meeting is the last stand of sin as an enemy and the opening of victory because meeting is also supplication since sin cannot meet Christ without the sinner and at the cross sinners meet with supplication together with a Mediator who says “Father forgive”.

(3) The adversative “yet” in Isaiah 53.4 has no equivalent in the Hebrew. The text simply states “**We reckoned or invented the notion** bcj that He was “stricken **smitten of God** and afflicted” (as a sort of leprous punishment for his supposed blasphemy). Then comes the adversative “**But he was pierced or wounded for our transgressions and bruised or sorely hurt in spirit for our iniquity**” (53.4). It was all about man’s sin and human malice - not divine wrath upon Him.

There is then 53.10 where *Tregelles* renders “It pleased the Lord to sicken His wound”. What is this? Is this God adding grief to grief? What can “bruising sickness” or “trampling sorrow” mean? It means that his sickness to death was refined yet further. The image comes from “threshing” and brokenness so that in **the deepest refined obedience the life of Christ** was put under extreme pressure and strain of knowing the sickness of death amid the instant totally irreversible and unprecedented circumstances of this death. We are facing what *Kierkegaard* speaks of as “sickness unto death” the final throes. The Hiphal verb “to make sick” must speak of the final breaking of the heart. ***This cup was to be drunk to the dregs***. Both Gethsemane and Calvary declare what Paul calls the humility or humiliation of the cross. At Gethsemane there was an angel and here there was “darkness” **yet was Christ to endure the non-interference of the Father until his heart was broken in death**. The Father chased the heckling chiding reviling crowds away in the darkness and through the quaking but yet Christ in his spirit had to endure to the bitter end - but as Peter stated He showed himself “perfect” with unprecedented obedience of a refined sort not found in men below and as the perfect

lamb amid most awful torture suffering of mind and body. When He was reviled He reviled not again (1Peter2.23).

(4) Verse 10. And the Lord is willing or inclines *to continually smite Him with stripes* crushing His spirit He makes Himself sick (cf. the same usage in Micah 6.13 where **God makes Himself sick** by striking others – clearly He turned to making Himself sick for them! Hebrew *yljh* Hiphil with the reflexive meaning) because You will place His soul or physical life as an offering - that *by which one contracts guilt* (Numbers 5.7-8) (Hebrew *mva*). This is the experience of a deep love – for God’s compassions fail not in the event of the death of the Son of God. This deep turbulence of spirit in the Son of God is reflected according to Isaiah deep in the loving heart of the Father of Spirits. So much for theories of wrath.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE FROM THE PAST

The patristic era has much to teach and stood nearer the apostles and breathed the cleaner air of doctrine before scholasticism or Reformers sought to delve into the counsels of God.

Athanasius

Athanasius in the 4th century explained Christ’s cry of abandonment as identification with our human affections. He says “In the incarnation the Son receives them from us and offers them to the Father interceding for us that in him they might be annulled (Against the Arians) This is so clear and good a commentary on the action of Christ at the mercy seat of His death as Calvin cannot resist –it may well be at the heart of propitiation and would spare us much debate if we returned to the simplicity and grace of this church father.

Ambrose mentor of Augustine

“He speaks bearing my terrors for when we are in the midst of dangers we think ourselves abandoned by God”. (Post Nicene Library)

Gregory of Nazianzus

The eternal and holy second person of the Trinity did not “become” sin. What Christ became was a sin offering, an offering for sin (a reading entirely consistent with biblical text and supported by marginal readings) It was “Not that the Lord was transformed into either of these[sin or a curse], how could He be?” Gregory like myself thought

it literally non-sensical and unthinkable - although there is the Greek Ethics path of which I am not sure he would be familiar. He further states “By taking them upon Him He took away our sins and bore our iniquities”

Cyril of Alexandria

Second Corinthians 5.21 shows the fact that Jesus Christ was “counted among the lawless” so when we hear the cry of dereliction we should not think in terms of a broken and forsaken man. We are to understand that in becoming man the Only Begotten spoke these words as one of us and on behalf of our nature. It was as if He was saying “the first man transgressed. He slipped into disobedience...but you Lord have made me a second beginning for all on the earth, and I am called the Second Adam. In me you see the nature of man made clean, its faults corrected, made holy and pure (Cyril on The unity of Christ)

John of Damascus 7th-8th Century

Neither as God nor as man was He ever forsaken by the Father, nor did He become sin or a curse, nor did he require to be made subject to the Father. For as God he is equal to the Father and not opposed to him or subjected to Him. Ranking Himself with us He used these words for it is we who are “bound in the fetters of sin and the curse as faithless and disobedient, and therefore forsaken”. The idea is that Jesus identifies with us and bridges the gap of our forsakenness and rescues us from the curse.

Concluding postscript

The Fathers of the first seven centuries cannot be so wrong and the Church of the Reformers so right as we think is the case on the contrived mystery of weighing the wrath of the Second Death against that of God imposed on Jesus and theorizing about the pains of Hell as they apply to the cross. These are areas I should like Calvinism to leave well alone for they are not cogent to stating how we are justified or how we are loved neither can they be particularly demonstrated. Those who were nearer clearly saw Christ as reconciliation and a means of bringing us back to God. All that He spoke from the cross can probably be fitted into that concept. Have we made a seriously flawed analysis and imagined the Lord confused over a mission He had committed to before the world was – a mission He accomplished in full

correspondence with the Father and shared with the apostles as He told them it would be completed when He was delivered into the hands of men and suffer from them many things? Could He have missed His way after all that happened to encourage and confirm the high purpose of the cross in Gethsemane? Was the purpose to be that the Father rolled wrath over Him or was this glorious obedience the basis for a successful appeal on our behalf? Was the Christ of the cross dynamic in a sense never before known in opening up heaven for believers? Was the line of victory to run from here to the New Jerusalem through the centuries of Church History whilst the Lord saw of the travail of His soul and found the true “satisfaction” of men and women for God in every age - a church to take as a bride - an elect to enjoy throughout eternity? Maybe we have made it all disingenuously complicated!

FINIS

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