

Reformation Fellowship Discussion Outline:
Critique of the Ordinary Christian's Creed
Handout #10

Points #17-25 of "The Ordinary Christian's Creed" > My Critique

A. Underlying theory of atonement reflected in the remainder of the Ordinary Christian's Creed (Handout 1): *Full Compensation Theory of the Atonement*

Traditional Theory: The *Full Compensation Theory of the Atonement*

*The title of this theory is intended to highlight the fact that, on this theory, God has been set free to offer eternal Life to whomever he chooses because Jesus has fully compensated God for the debt owed to him by that individual. By Jesus' death, the moral debt that an individual sinner incurred through his sinfulness has been fully paid; God has been **fully compensated** for that sinner's offenses.*

Critical assumption: *God could not leave me unpunished for my sins if the penalty due me for my sins had not otherwise been paid.*

- Each and every human individual owes a debt to divine justice; specifically, he owes it to divine justice to be punished with eternal death for his evil.
- This debt to divine justice is so inviolable that, unless and until it is paid in full, God would be unrighteous to grant the blessing of eternal Life to any sinful individual.
- In order to free himself from the inviolable demands of his own righteousness so that he would be morally free to bless certain human individuals with eternal Life, God sent Jesus, his Son, to actually pay the penalty of death that those individuals owed to divine justice.
- In order that he might show mercy to countless individuals, God sent Jesus, his Son, to actually pay the penalty of death that all of those countless individuals owed to divine justice. In fact, arguably, he paid the penalty of death that all of mankind throughout all of human history owed to divine justice.
- Jesus had a divine nature; and that nature, being divine, is infinite. Therefore, Jesus' death was of infinite value and significance. Jesus' death was capable of paying the debt to divine justice for all of mankind throughout all of time.
- Because of Jesus' death, God is morally free to bless with eternal Life whomever he chooses to so bless.

B. The theory of the atonement reflected in the teaching of Jesus and in that of the authors of the New Testament: *Effective Advocacy Theory of the Atonement*

Alternative theory: The *Effective Advocacy Theory of the Atonement*

*The title of this theory is intended to highlight the fact that, on this theory, it is in the intercession of Jesus (and not in the death of Jesus) that we find the key to a sinful individual's being granted eternal Life. The sinful individual will receive eternal Life from God if and only if Jesus effectively intercedes for him, appealing to God to grant him mercy. Jesus' death is important to his being qualified to offer effective advocacy on behalf of the sinner, but ultimately, it is his **effective advocacy**, not his death, that secures mercy and Life for the sinful individual.*

Critical assumption: *God can quite definitely leave the penalty due me for my sins to go completely unpaid. Indeed it is in the very nature of God's mercy and in the very definition of divine forgiveness for him to do so.*

- An individual sinner will be granted mercy from God if and only if Jesus wants God to grant mercy to that particular individual.
- Jesus will appeal to God to forgive a particular individual for his sins and grant him Life, in spite of the fact that he deserves death and destruction. God will heed Jesus' request. Therefore, Life will come to a sinful individual if and only if Jesus asks for it and God honors Jesus' request.
- God will never fail to honor Jesus' request. Hence, God will grant Life to whomever Jesus wants it to be given.
- God will honor Jesus' requests for mercy toward certain individuals for two reasons: (1) God has granted Jesus the authority to determine who will and who will not receive Life; and (2) God "loves" Jesus and will, for that reason, grant him what he wants.
- God "loves" Jesus, his Son, for a number of reasons; but Jesus' death on the cross is the most important reason of all. In voluntarily going to his torture and death, Jesus was manifesting two important things: (1) heroic obedience to the purposes of his Father, and (2) God-like love for other human beings. Both of these qualities were very pleasing to God and secured God's love for Jesus.
- It is God's love for Jesus that qualifies Jesus to effectively advocate for human sinners whom he wants to rescue from condemnation. Because God loves Jesus, God will grant eternal Life to whomever Jesus wants. Whomever Jesus wants to take with him into his eternal Kingdom, God will mercifully forgive such a one for his sin and will grant him eternal Life instead of the death and destruction he deserves.

C. Critique of specific assertions within the following points of the "Ordinary Christian's Creed" (Handout #1):

1. Point #17:

- a. "The sins of all of mankind throughout all of human history were placed on Jesus."
 - i. *Traditional view requires this; but it is false because traditional view has a faulty understanding of the cross and of the atonement.*
 - ii. *Human sin does not need to be "placed" on Jesus as if Jesus needs to "pay for" it in and through his death; rather, we need to understand that in his death, Jesus is displaying the just deserts of human sin.*
 - (A) That is what is meant by he "died for our sins."
- b. "God directed his just wrath against all of the sins of all of humanity."
 - i. *He did not "direct" his wrath (he wasn't angry with Jesus); he DISPLAYED his wrath.*
 - ii. *It was not his wrath toward "all the sins of all of humanity" that he displayed; rather it was his wrath toward HUMAN sin.*
 - (A) Jesus was not the locus of all the sins of humanity; Jesus was the representative of every human being who deserved death and destruction. He portrayed in his death what each and every damnable human being deserves.
- c. "fully vented and fully spent"
 - i. *No, God did not vent and spend his wrath at all; he displayed it. Ultimately, God does not observe that his wrath has already been vented; he **forgives** us.*
- d. "The just penalty for all of human sin was paid in full against..."
 - i. *No, the just penalty for human sin NEVER gets paid for those who receive eternal Life.*

2. Point #18:

- a. "paid out the just penalty"
 - i. *No, rather, **displayed** the just penalty.*
- b. "for all the sins of all of mankind"
 - i. *No, rather, for human sin as a category. Jesus' death was not the death due to divine justice for each and every sin of all mankind. Rather, Jesus' death was representative of what each and every human sinner deserved for his sinfulness.*
- c. "that God had built into the fabric of his cosmos"
 - i. *No, there were no built-in limits to God's mercy. God only needed a reason to show mercy.*
 - ii. *Jesus' death did not "work magic" in the fabric of the universe; Jesus' death secured God's love for Jesus (in addition to fulfilling God's purposes).*

- (A) The purpose of Jesus' death was not to solve a problem for God.
- (B) The purpose of Jesus' death was to make a statement to mankind (and thereby confront mankind with a question that would test him).

3. Point #19 and Point #20:

- a. "Jesus was infinite in his being and power."
 - i. *Jesus was NOT infinite; he was a finite human.*
 - ii. *Jesus being infinite has nothing to do with the atonement.*
- b. "absorb the full measure of God's wrath against him"
 - i. *God did not pour out his wrath against Jesus; he displayed his wrath.*
 - ii. *God was not angry toward Jesus.*
- c. Jesus did not absorb and "conquer" the wrath of God toward sin; Jesus acted in love and obedience and, for that reason, God raised Jesus up from the dead.
 - i. *Jesus did not conquer death and rise from the dead; the Father, who loved Jesus, raised him up and gave Life to him.*
- d. Jesus' victory over death means that mankind will have victory over death
 - i. *Though frequently expressed, this makes little sense even in the traditional view.*
 - ii. *It makes no sense in the biblical view—Jesus did not attain victory over death; he was granted victory over death.*
 - iii. *Mankind will be granted victory over death because Jesus is there to intercede for us, not because Jesus "conquered" death.*

4. Point #21:

- a. No! (See earlier discussion of Trinity and godhead.)

5. Point #22:

- a. "God now had the freedom to grant him eternal Life without being in violation of his own inherent justice."
 - i. *God was always "free" to show mercy and grant Life.*
 - ii. *By definition, "mercy" is a violation of his own inherent justice; but it is NOT a violation of his own inherent goodness and righteousness.*
 - (A) Divine mercy is an element that is inherent within God's innate goodness and righteousness.