

Reformation Fellowship Discussion Outline:
Critique of the Ordinary Christian's Creed
Handout #11

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

A. It is not the case that the Bible clearly and incontrovertibly teaches the traditional (full compensation) view of the atonement.

1. **"Atonement"** = act of reconciliation.
 - a. It does not specify how the reconciliation takes place.
 - b. The concept of atonement does not necessarily entail the traditional view.
2. **"Propitiation"** = act of transforming wrath into acceptance (affection?).
 - a. It does not specify how and why the propitiation happens.
 - b. The concept of propitiation does not necessarily entail the traditional view.
3. **"Redemption"** / **"redemption price"** =
 - a. act of setting someone (a slave) free;
 - i. *Note the redemption of our bodies, Romans 8, does not involve nor imply any payment being made. Redemption is the concept of someone being set free simpliciter (pure and simple).*
 - b. act of paying a price in order to earn the right to set a slave free.
 - i. *Jesus paid the price of sacrificing his life in order to "redeem" us from eternal condemnation and death.*
 - c. Note, therefore, that ...
 - i. *The concept of redemption does not specify the exact relationship between the "payment" Jesus made and our being set free from eternal condemnation and death—that is, the concept of redemption does not itself specify that Jesus' death was the satisfaction of a debt we owed to divine justice.*

(A) The most that can be known from the N.T. employing the concept of redemption is this: It cost Jesus something (that is, Jesus paid a price) to bring about our freedom from condemnation to death.
 - ii. *The concept of redemption does not necessarily entail the traditional view.*
4. One can find a variety of "proof-texts to the effect that...
 - 1> *Jesus was sent by God to die.*
 - 2> *Jesus died for our sins.*
 - 3> *Jesus "paid" for our sins.*

4> Jesus paid a price for our redemption; he paid the redemption price.

5> Through his death, Jesus cancelled our debt.

6> Jesus was "made sin" on our behalf.

- a. Each and every one of the above New Testament claims is typically assumed to "prove" the traditional (full compensation) view of the atonement.
- b. However, none of the above New Testament claims does, in fact, "prove" the traditional (full compensation) view of the atonement, for each of these claims is no less compatible with and entailed by the Effective Advocacy Theory of the Atonement than it is with the Full Compensation Theory of the Atonement.

B. Arguably, what the N.T. does assert about salvation through Jesus' death is MORE AT HOME in the effective advocacy model than it is in the traditional, full compensation model.

1. Forgiveness

- a. To speak of God forgiving us for our sins is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

2. Mercy

- a. To speak of God abounding in mercy toward us sinners is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.
 - i. Traditional theory insists that God's mercy is limited by his NEED for justice to be satisfied.*

3. Gift of eternal Life as a gift of grace

- a. To speak of God granting us grace when he grants us Life is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

4. Jesus' authority to grant Life

- a. To speak of God granting authority to Jesus to decide who will live and who will die is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

5. Jesus' role as intercessor

- a. To emphasize Jesus' role as intercessor is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

6. Connecting our salvation to the resurrection (as arguably the N.T. does)

- a. To emphasize Jesus' resurrection in the context of our salvation is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

7. Voluntary nature of Jesus' death (arguably a N.T. emphasis)

- a. To emphasize the voluntary nature of Jesus' death is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory.
8. Public nature of Jesus' death (arguably a N.T. emphasis)
 - a. To emphasize the public nature of Jesus' death is more naturally reflective of the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory than it is of the FULL COMPENSATION theory. Jesus' death being available for a human being to "see" and confront is unnecessary to the FULL COMPENSATION theory and would be an extraneous add-on to the theory.
9. Belief in cross
 - a. Belief in Jesus' death on the cross as an essential aspect of believing in Jesus is "required" by the EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY theory; it is quite superfluous within the FULL COMPENSATION theory.

The traditional view believes two independent and unrelated things: (1) Jesus died to pay mankind's debt to divine justice thereby freeing God to be merciful; and (2) God has established belief in Jesus' death on the cross as the condition that one must meet in order to receive eternal Life.

By contrast, the alternative view believes one thing: (1) Jesus died to make a divinely ordained statement to mankind about the seriousness of their guilt in order to establish acceptance of that statement as the condition that one must meet in order to receive eternal Life.

On the traditional view, belief in Christ crucified as a condition of salvation is a condition that is extrinsic to the meaning and significance of Jesus' death. On the alternative view, belief in Christ crucified as a condition of salvation is a condition that is intrinsic to the meaning and significance of Jesus' death.

C. Several assertions that follow logically from the traditional view (often asserted by Christians) are NEVER explicitly asserted by the N.T. authors:

1. God's purpose in having Jesus' die was specifically in order to satisfy God's need to have justice satisfied.
2. Jesus' death "matched" in quantity mankind's debt to God's justice.
3. Jesus' death guarantees divine mercy.
 - a. My salvation is a matter of justice.
 - i. *God would be unjust to condemn me, since Jesus paid my debt.*
 - ii. *I have a just claim on the eternal blessing.*
4. Jesus' death was metaphysically necessary.

D. Several critical assumptions underlying the traditional, full compensation view are not morally tenable; others are not philosophically tenable. The effective advocacy theory is both philosophically and morally tenable in all its underlying assumptions.

1. To maintain that a MORAL debt can be paid by someone else (that is, by a scapegoat) is a morally untenable claim. It is not a satisfaction of justice to make someone other than the guilty party pay a moral debt. It is a grave INJUSTICE.
2. To imagine that a moral debt is meaningfully quantifiable is problematic. Likewise, to imagine that the compensatory value of Jesus' death is meaningfully quantifiable is problematic.
 - a. The alleged calculus of the traditional view is problematic.
 - i. *The "infinite" nature of Jesus is problematic in the first place.*
 - ii. *The following traditional calculus is fraught with philosophical difficulty:
infinity x one person's death = an infinite payment for the injustice of human sinfulness.*
 - b. Why was Jesus required to remain dead for only three days? How is that sufficient payment for a debt that—if I were to pay it—would require an eternal death?
 - i. *It is philosophically problematic that three days in tomb = eternal condemnation.*
 - (A) The traditional view argues that the infinity of Jesus' nature makes it sufficient compensation.
 - (B) The Bible never shows us, nor argues on the basis of, this calculation.
 - (1) If Jesus' "infinite" nature explains its infinite compensatory value, then why wouldn't Jesus' remaining dead for one second have made an infinite payment?

E. The morally and philosophically problematic assumptions that underlie the full compensation theory of the atonement are never explicitly asserted by any biblical author.

1. Nevertheless, one could—on the basis of biblical authority—accept and embrace assumptions that appear to us to be morally and philosophically objectionable, if the biblical authors actually asserted such assumptions.
2. However, no biblical author ever explicitly asserts any of these problematic assumptions underlying the full compensation theory.
 - a. Bible teachers and theologians assert these assumptions routinely. The biblical authors NEVER do!

F. In the light of all of the above, it is more reasonable to hold the Effective Advocacy Theory of the atonement than it is to hold the Full Compensation Theory of the atonement.