

## **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH VIII: 5**

*(Reading: Daniel 9:20-27; Colossians 1:3-23)*

### **Why Christ's Sacrifice Was Perfectly Acceptable**

Having seen in chapter 6 of the Westminster Confession what Scripture says about man's fall into sin and in chapter 7 about man's present survival only because of God's covenant, this 8th chapter outlines for us what God did to fulfil that covenant. So this has to be a chapter where Christ is absolutely central. As indeed He is.

The first Article of this chapter tells how it is Christ whom God chose to do it through. The second Article told of how Christ was the One to do it. The third described what Christ was given to do it. And the fourth Article sums up the Bible's teaching on which way Christ did it. Considering all that this chapter has already confessed about Christ, what we come to here, in the fifth Article, is what draws all of the above together. Here we see why Christ's sacrifice was perfectly acceptable. This is the vital point in the heart of the Biblical faith.

We see that in this Article in two aspects. Two parts which are that vital they bring out two biblical distinctives the Reformation rediscovered. Two points which come out of the two halves of this Article.

### **Jesus Lived for Us the Perfect Life**

And so, in the first place, we see that JESUS LIVED FOR US THE PERFECT LIFE. This is what Article 5 begins with: "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He, through the eternal Spirit, once offered unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father."

Christ has fully satisfied all the demands of divine justice upon those whom he represents. A.A. Hodge draws us back to the second chapter of the Confession on this point - the chapter about God Himself. He notes, "As we saw, the essential justice of the divine nature demands the punishment of sin. It demands also that the condition of the original covenant of works should be fulfilled before the reward is granted."

Now, the original covenant of works is fulfilled through Christ's obedience. This is also known as His 'active obedience'.

The justice of the divine nature is what the Lord suffers in the sorrows of His life and death. This is also known as His 'passive obedience'. For Christ suffered as the representative of sinners.

Our sins were placed upon Him. In the words of Galatians 3 verse 13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." And in John's first letter chapter 2, verse 2, we read, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins."

So while Christ suffered only in his single human soul and body, and only for a time, yet His person was the infinite and transcendently glorious person of the eternal Son of God. Thus His sufferings were according to the exact demands of God's justice. He did exactly enough.

Now, you would think this teaching of Scripture is clear enough. But it was one that the Church had drifted away from in the time just before the Reformation. The teaching of the Church then had been that sinners were saved through infused grace. They said that sinners are saved by grace infused into their hearts by the sacraments. And thus it was that this doctrine of infused grace, with its focus on what the believer experienced, had led into all kinds of strange spirituality during the middle ages. There had been mysticism, monasticism, asceticism,

masochism, and sacramentalism. It is still the official teaching and practice of Roman Catholicism today.

It was the Reformation which recovered and preached the Biblical doctrine of salvation by the righteousness of Christ being imputed to believers through faith alone. But even during the Reformation many of those who left the Roman Church adopted its subjectivist view of salvation by religious experience. Luther never repudiated the superstition of eating the physical body and drinking the physical blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. The German Enthusiasts and Pietists, the Dutch Arminians and the Wesleyans are also examples of the same. John Wesley strongly attacked the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone.

This is how we can explain why there was so much apparent Christian support for Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ." Because those evangelicals are pumping it alright! Billy Graham reportedly cried after seeing it. He said that it was more powerful than a lifetime of sermons.

You see, much as we might not like to recognise it we have to state that many so-called evangelicals are Romanist at heart. John Robbins is quite right to say that the crucial debates over salvation five centuries ago was not only grace versus works but at a more deeper level the struggle of imputed righteousness versus infused grace. After reflecting on how this struggle has not only continued between the Reformers and Rome but also within Protestantism itself, he further brings out that in the 19th and 20th centuries "evangelicals" used new terms to describe the plan of salvation. But they weren't terms found in Scripture. They spoke of a "personal encounter with Christ", a "personal relationship with Christ," "let Jesus into your heart," "put Christ on the throne of your heart."

These evangelicals took on the Medieval religion of religious experience. They rejected the Biblical doctrine of justification through an imputed righteousness which comes only by belief of the Gospel. And that's exactly why we saw millions of them bankrolling Mel Gibson's movie, 'The Passion of the Christ.' Indeed, it has become the highest grossing non-English language film ever seen. They seek religious experience, and this movie - a high-tech version of a Medieval Passion Play - gives them that. And they think that's Christianity.

Is it any wonder so many got caught up in the so-called Toronto Blessing? That was certainly an infused grace. That was a blessing that came by a touch.

How different this is from Scripture. When the apostle in Romans 3 verse 25 says that God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood, the last thing he was speaking of was anything any of us had to do! Our Lord didn't die simply to make the salvation of those for whom he died possible – He died with the intended purpose of actually securing their salvation.

This was shown with what happened once to a Mr Guthrie, a Presbyterian minister in Scotland. One evening he was travelling home very late. Having lost his way in a moor, he laid the reins on the neck of his horse, and trusted himself to God's providence. After a long distance over ditches and fields, the horse brought him to a farmer's house. He knocked on the door and asked permission to stay until morning. They let him do that.

Now it so happened that the lady of the house was dying. A Catholic priest was administering the rite of extreme unction to her.

Guthrie said nothing until the priest had gone. He then went to the lady and asked her if she enjoyed peace in the prospect of death, because of what the priest had said and done to her. She answered that she didn't.

Then he spoke to her of salvation through the atoning blood of the Redeemer. The Lord taught her to understand. She was enabled to believe the message of mercy. She died triumphing in Jesus Christ her Saviour.

After witnessing this astonishing scene the minister mounted his horse, and rode home. On his arrival, he told Mrs Guthrie he had seen a great wonder during the night. 'I came,' he said, 'to a farm-house, where I found a woman in a state of nature; I saw her in a state of grace; and I left her in a state of glory.'

### **Jesus Obtained for Us Eternal Life**

This ties in very well with the second part of the sermon. For having seen that JESUS LIVED FOR US THE PERFECT LIFE, we come now to realise that JESUS OBTAINED FOR US ETERNAL LIFE. Here we consider the second half of Article 5. This is about how Christ "purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him."

Now, you have a good look at this part of Article 5. Then think about the Five Points of Calvinism in that acronym T.U.L.I.P.. This is the flower whose letters stand for key doctrines which came out again in the Reformation. One of those letters is being spoken about here. Could it be the T in Total Depravity; the U in Unconditional Election; the L in Limited Atonement; the I is Irresistible Grace; or the P in the Perseverance of the Saints?

This is about Limited Atonement, isn't it? For this is speaking of the eternal inheritance for all those the Father has given Christ.

Here, though, many Christians disagree with us. They say we are wrong to say that Christ was a substitute for some men instead of all men. There will be Lutherans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and others, who say that we limit the atonement.

But who's limiting what? Because what does their Arminian system actually do? They admit that not everyone will be saved. So there's no argument about Christ's work ultimately resulting in only a limited number of the human race being saved.

The difference is not over the ultimate effect of the atonement, but rather the original design of it. Calvinism has always said that the works of God are always consistent. As we confess here, we say that those who are actually saved are those who God planned to save.

The Arminians say, however, that the atonement is meant to give "equal" benefits for everyone. But that means that because Christ did as much for any particular person as He did for any other - that is, to make salvation possible - they cannot quite say that Christ did enough to actually secure the salvation of anyone. If they were to say that they would have to logically say that everyone will be saved. And universal salvation is something the Bible definitely doesn't teach! At best the Arminian believes that what Christ does only gets us a chance at being saved.

So it's no surprise that when Presbyterian churches have become Arminian they try to accommodate their faith to this view. G. I. Williamson gives the example of the United Presbyterian Church which in 1926 got rid of this point and instead replaced it with a new creed stating that Christ "gave himself as a ransom for all". Of course with that statement they also had to say that Christ's atonement only gained "free access to God for pardon and restoration".

And this is something less than complete salvation - it's just that chance of it. Williamson is quite right to state strongly, "This is truly 'limited' atonement is the reprehensible sense."

It is certainly not what Scripture teaches. Jesus was given His Name 'Jesus' because it means He would save His people from their sins. That's what Matthew 1 verse 21 states. And at the end of Matthew's Gospel, in chapter 20 verse 28, the Lord says He gave "his life as a ransom for many"

– not for all. John’s Gospel in chapter 6 verses 38 and 39 records the promise of Jesus that He would save those the Father had given Him. In Romans 8, when the apostle in describing how God predestines those being saved he states, in verse 32, that it was because He didn’t spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all. And he specifically says in the next verse that “us all” means only God’s elect.

Now it may be said that Scripture does speak in universal or general terms. But these passages are generally drawing a contrast between the single nation of the Jews or to a particular class of mankind. So it means that Christ died for people of every class from the nations and that a great multitude will be saved. That’s what we know from other scriptures.

But there’s always that question people ask, isn’t there? The question which goes, “Why doesn’t God save all men?”

The question which we must answer with another question, for they need to be asked, “Why does He save any at all?” That’s the wonder of this Article! JESUS LIVED FOR US THE PERFECT LIFE. And JESUS OBTAINED FOR US ETERNAL LIFE. It doesn’t get any greater than that! You see, if God had condemned you to an eternal hell, it would’ve been better than you deserved. No matter how huge the condemnation which God heaps on anyone it’s a better fate than he deserves.

So the question we should be asking is, rather, “Why did God save me?” Ask that question from your heart and you’ll know the answer, because that will drive you to glorify God all the more. Then you know it was only by a sovereign act of grace and mercy that the Son of God laid down His life upon the cross for your salvation.

It was for you - not just any Tom, Dick or Harry. It was specifically for you and every other child of God. It’s because your name is written in His book that Jesus Christ was actively and passively obedient.

You must know that the darkness was deeper because your name was written in the book. You must know that the wrath of God was more terrible, the agony He bore more intense, because He carried your sins with Him to the cross.

This is what Daniel prophesied in verse 26 of Daniel chapter 9. And this is what the apostle Paul looks back upon in Colossians 1 verse 20. He wrote that it was through Christ God reconciled to Himself all things by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. As John 17 verses 1 and 2 records in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus, “Father the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all you have given him.”

Well, congregation, we now know He was glorified. And you know how? – because so are we!