



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

TRANSCRIPT

“Substitutionary Atonement and Contemporary ‘Evangelical’ Theology”

[Message] Well the topic that I would be responsible for about a week ago when Gary called me and asked me if I would substitute and I had written an article that is to be published around the turn of the year on substitution and I asked him if it would be possible for me to give this particular paper and so that’s what I’m going to do. It’s a little long and so I’m going to have to read very rapidly. And I’ll try to read in such a way that you won’t all of you go to sleep. But I’m going to be reading rapidly. The subject is the survey of the theological concept of substitution and its importance for proclamation today.

At the heart of evangelical theology for centuries has been the theme that the message of the gospel is centered in the preaching of Jesus Christ and him crucified. And it’s been argued violently that in this message is found the essence of the orthodox doctrine of the atonement. In further defense of its message, the church especially in its Reformed branches has contended that the proper understanding of the nature of the atonement of our Lord settles the major questions that the atonement raises.

To be specific, if the atonement is sacrificial, penal and substitutionary, other matters such as its extent and reference find easier solution. It is the conviction of the author of this paper that the proper emphasis upon the substitutionary aspect of the

“Substitutionary Atonement and Contemporary ‘Evangelical’ Theology” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

atonement has been misled in our day. Mislead I should have said. We must remember this if we are to regain deep confidence in the message of the gospel as the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. And we emphasize that its benefits right at the beginning so there be no question about this, do accrue to all who believe. In addition, even in the professing evangelical circles, a saddening omission of stress upon the atonement’s penal aspect may be found. “Who wants to hear about sin?” is a question heard from other mouths than Robert Schuller. Therefore, to the historically orthodox doctrine of penal substitution, this paper is addressed.

The doctrine of penal substitution, almost a century ago, Robert L. Dabney expressed succinctly the perennial objection to the claim that Jesus Christ died a penal substitutionary death for sinners.

“This cardinal conception” he said, “is rejected by the multitudes of rationalizing nominal Christians through every party, from Socinians upward. They say that they much reject it as essentially unjust as thus obnoxious to necessary moral intuitions and so impossible to be ascribed to a righteous god.”

Dabney made some very important points in his small but useful book. He distinguished potential guilt, the sense of wrong doing which springs up immediately from our consciences after sin from actual guilt, reatus, the state of an accused person or guilty person. Actual guilt is thus the obligation to punishment because of sin the penal decision of the lawgiver. When then the Scriptures speak of imputation and substitution, the reference is not to potential guilt or our sinful nature, but to actual guilt. It’s the latter alone which God’s forgiveness removes in this life although the saving work of Christ ultimately removes our sinfulness too. It must be kept in mind that the penal substitution of Christ at Calvary removes actual guilt. Dabney concludes, “And the whole question between us and the objectors is this, may the sovereign judge righteously provide for such

a substitution when the free consent of the substitute is given and all the other conditions are provided by God for good results?”

Much hinges upon these simple matters. Recent theological history indicates that the denial of penal substitution has led to the modification or perversion of such orthodox doctrines as the divine attributes specifically in the elimination of retributive justice from God’s perfection, in the raising of questions concerning God’s immutability, in the raising of questions concerning the infiniteness of sin’s evil. It’s not hard to find contemporary illustrations of the views that Dabney in the last century deplored.

John Hick, whose views of atonement lie within the commonly accepted Abelardian model -- incidentally, the Abelardian model is sometimes misunderstood, but I think that’s valid to say that they lie within the commonly accepted Abelardian model. Hick rejects fundamentally almost out of hand the orthodox view which he calls quote, “the old protestant penal substitutionary atonement theory” unquote. That’s the viewpoint probably of each of you in this audience or at least almost all of you. He finds that viewpoint quote, “morally and spiritually repugnant” unquote, thus informing us that Dabney’s opponents are still with us in the 20th Century.

The two most common biblical texts cited as denying substitution are Deuteronomy chapter 24 and verse 16 and Ezekiel chapter 18 and verse 10. The former, affirming personal responsibility and family solidarity, while Ezekiel asserts the principle that “Retribution is not communicated by generation but is born only by the individual involved” unquote. It’s easy to see that the human situations differ from the divine, and it must be admitted that human analogies are not inspired, but occasionally we’re forced to use them.

In the imagined human situation of the broken law, excluding the guilty criminal, a murderer, there are four distinct parties, the wronged family of the murdered man and the society, the judge, the proposed innocent substitute and the Supreme Court in our case, the king in other societies for example. Let us agree that it would be wrong to

“Substitutionary Atonement and Contemporary ‘Evangelical’ Theology” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

sentence an innocent person although willing to suffer death in the place of a guilty murderer. The teaching of Scripture is quite different. “There is the condemned criminal, the guilty sinner” Guillebaud notes, “But beside him, there is only one who is judged wrong party king and substitute.” God was not administering someone else’s law but his own. And the sin was not committed against someone else, but against him. And above all, he did not take someone else and accept him as a substitute for the condemned sinner. He refused an offer of this kind made by Moses, but he came himself, took upon him the nature of the guilty ones and bore the penalty of his own law. The substitute who died on Calvary expressly declared himself to be the judge of the world, Matthew chapter 13 verse 41 through 43 and 25: 31 through 46. Who then are we poor humans to rail against a divine trinitarian work?

Well, some critics of the teaching have seen it as self evident that one man’s sin cannot be transferred to another. Is it not remarkable as Dabney says quote, “That not only the most devout Christians, but the greatest thinkers and philosophers of all ages are like Tuntius, Augustine and Anselm and Aquinas a Luther, a Calvin, a Pascal, a Claude a Turretin, a Butler, a Newton, a Chalmers, an Edwards, a Wesley and an Archibald Alexander and a Thornwall and we might add for the 20th Century a Bavinck a Warfield a Machen and others saw no difficulty in this proposition which our Socinianizers find so unspeakably absurd. The following is a simple Biblical exegetical and theological survey of the concept of penal substitution with its application to the doctrine of the atonement of Christ.

Now I’d like to speak for just a few moments about specific objections to penal substitution. This great doctrine of Christ’s penal substitutionary sacrifice is not popular today in churches that joyfully affirmed and disseminated it far and wide in earlier centuries. I’m sure if you will think for one moment about the kind of ministry that you hear in churches today, you will find that there is an attempt in many of them to run over with little emphasis the significance of Christ’s substitutionary death and what that

ultimately means. I mention in this study specifically three objections that are common in the kind of society in which most of us live.

First of all it said that this view of the work of Christ assumes a schism in the Trinity which is a monstrous idea so we are told, a schism in the Trinity. Well of course I agree with that. God it is claimed is the stern judge insisting on the execution of justice, and Christ is the merciful savior who interposes and satisfies the legal demand of the Father, appeasing his wrath against sinners. The members of the Trinity are not one in their attitude to men according to this view. God is propitiated while Christ propitiates – how can there be one impulse in God to punish and another impulse not to punish. The impulse to save can only be an impulse of love and not at all of justice. Occasionally evangelicals aid this view by speaking as if Christ and not the Triune God is the sole author of salvation.

The objection has no substance; there is no schism in the Trinity. Rather, there is perfect harmony. For Father sacrificing his Son, the Son willingly offering himself and the Spirit applying the benefits of the satisfaction to God’s elect. And as for God, by this view being only a just and wrathful Deity let us remember that it is the love of God that leads to the gift of the redeeming Son. There is no antagonism between God’s love and justice and John plainly affirms. Listen to John, “In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation (The satisfaction, the word from which the saving import cannot be removed.) for our sins.” 1 John 4:10. The Psalmist puts it this way, “Loving kindness and truth have met together a righteousness and peace have kissed each other,” Psalm 85:10.

And second, it has been more recently claimed that the Bible does not make use of the concept of punishment in connection with atonement. Hendrikus Berkhof, a very well known contemporary Dutch theologian, claims that this view found in Western Orthodoxy since Anselm, “Is foreign to the New Testament.” I ask, can anyone maintain

this in the light of Isaiah 53:5 and 6, 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21, Galatians 3:13. Listen to the first passage, and think remember we’re talking about punishment,

“But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well being fell upon him and by his scourging, we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.”

And to the second passage, 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21, “He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” And finally, and to me convincingly, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us, for it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” Many other passages affirm the same thing and furthermore trace the just bearing of our punishment to the justifying love of God. You might think of Romans 3:24 through 26 for example.

Third, it is said that penal satisfaction makes God inferior to man, for man freely forgives, but God cannot. Hence God is less charitable, merciful and good than man. This is to forget the office of God as judge of the universe. A judge may be very kind and forgiving as a private individual, but in his official duties, he must see that the law is followed to the letter. As a famous American judge once said, “When I have been tempted to relax my duty to be true to the law I have reminded myself that I have a duty to my country.” It must be remembered that the ultimate end of God’s own works is God himself and not his creatures well being. If we are to render to him all worship and reverence, should he not receive it?

These objections that contend that there is a schism in the Trinity or that man freely forgives but God cannot turn away stubbornly from the glorious truth of merciful satisfaction. Listen to Shedd, this is a great statement, this is one that I’ve cited in several

places and love every time I read it. Shedd says in a discussion like this, “There is mercy in permitting another person to do for the sinner what the sinner is bound to do for himself. And still greater mercy in providing that person, and greater still in becoming that person.” In speaking of Christ’s sacrifice, James Stalker the eminent Scottish minister and professor said,

“The dignity of the act is however chiefly brought out in the claim that he gave his life for many. When prisoners were bartered at the conclusion of a war, the exchange was not always simply man for man. An officer was of more value than a common soldier, and several soldiers might be redeemed by the surrender of one officer. For a woman of high rank or extraordinary beauty, a still greater number of prisoners might be exchanged, and by the giving up of a king’s son, many might be redeemed. So the sense of his own unique dignity and his peculiar relationship to God is implied in the statement that his life would redeem the lives of many.”

Now what I would like to do is take a look at the Old Testament roots of penal substitution and then after doing that for a bit, at the New Testament roots and I want to close with a few theological reflections on substitution and atonement. So now, the Old Testament roots of penal substitution. The Apostle Paul declared that our Lord died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:3, a statement that indicates that his death was not fortuitous. It was as Barrett says, “Willed and determined by God and that it formed part of the winding up of his eternal purpose.” And Barrett goes on to say that a death that took place in accordance with the Scriptures invites interpretation in Old Testament categories for example, of sacrifice, of punishment and atonement.

I’d like to look at several of the passages from the Old Testament that surely would or could have been in the apostle’s mind when he said, “He died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” The first, Genesis 15: 7-21, in the remarkable ratification of

the Abrahamic Covenant, by an ancient form of sacrifice, it is the Lord alone who passes between the pieces of the sacrificial animals. In other such covenantal procedures, both parties walked between the pieces of the animals, but here God in symbol walks between the pieces and Abram, note this, is not invited to follow. The meaning is clear; this covenant is not a conditional covenant in which duties must be fulfilled by man. Now of course in one sense there is responsibility and a duty will be performed, but it will be something that God will do for that individual. It is one in which God undertakes to fulfill the conditions himself, thus guarantying by divine fidelity to his word and by his power the accomplishment of the covenantal promises.

C.F. Keil points out that the representation pointed out that Abram was only bound to receive the gracious gifts of the Lord. Von Ranke, you couldn't accuse Von Ranke of being in the society of the fundamental believers in the kind of substitution that we are talking about. This well known German commentator agrees however here. He says, “The ceremony proceeded completely without words and with the complete passivity of the human partner.” And finally, to turn to a reformed man, Ridderbos, Herman Ridderbos puts it very vividly, “Abraham is deliberately excluded, he is the astonished spectator.” How good that is, that's worth reading Galatians Commentary by Ridderbos. An important point we must not miss is that the ratification is accomplished by the sacrifice of the animals, the death looking on typically to the obedient death of the seed of Abraham who would truly pass between the pieces suffering for the sins of his people and come out in victory with the promises in his hands. Clearly a penal substitution is reflected here.

The second text, Genesis chapter 22 verse 1 through verse 14, in one of the greatest scenes in the history of salvation, surpassed only by the greatest fathers offering up of his Isaac at Golgotha where the story here found its proper climax, an antitype, Abram obediently offered up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. All of the important features of Christ's penal substitutionary sacrifice are typically foreshadowed in the sacrifice of Isaac.

The son being bound and placed upon the altar, prepared for a death, interrupted only by the voice of the Angel of the Lord and the substitution of a ram for Isaac the type of Christ. The Apostle Paul borrowing language from verse 12 and 16 finds the antitype to Isaac's alter experience in our Lord's cross death. That Abraham offered up the ram instead of his son further stresses the substitutionary sacrifice of the offering.

Exodus 12, 1 through 13, your familiar with all of these passages I know. It is certain that one of the passages that Paul had in mind when he said that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures was Exodus 12:1 through 13, for the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.” The reference of course is a typical one to the death of Christ. The shedding of the lamb's blood was the means of deliverance of Israel's sons from the judgment of death the lamb was a substitute whose death prevented the destroying angel from slaying Israel's firstborn sons. The Passover thus, was part of the series of events in Israel's history that left them a pictorial pattern of expiation and propitiation by substitute in their salvation history aiding them in preparing for the coming of the Lamb of God.

Now in order to cover this, I'm going to have to skip a little bit and the book that is to be published that will contain this will be published around the turn of the year, edited by John Armstrong and has to do with some of the things that he sees ahead for evangelicalism that are not good. So I'm going to skip some things, if you're interested I suggest that you read that. But I would have said a few things about the ceremonial law and the Day of Atonement because it expresses very much the same thing. Another passage in the Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 52 verse 13 through chapter 53 verse 12. We've already made reference to that and I'm sure that most of you in our audience are familiar with it.

But now, let me turn to the New Testament exposition of substitution and refer to several texts in the New Testament. Mathew chapter 20 and verse 28, the interpretation of our Lord's death as a penal substitutionary sacrifice is found in almost all forms of the

New Testament teaching. The language of this text before us now, Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many,” is fully in line with the affirmation. It represents in this instance the teaching of our Lord himself, and three great truths cry out for emphasis. In the first place, he came voluntarily. The word come points to his entry into life, and the word gave to his exit. As someone has said they stress his volition in two things concerning which we are least consulted, our birth and our dying. The word came stresses his sovereignty and his service. It was the word he used of his coming except when he modifies it by was sent. With only one exception, he never uses the term born which was used in the one instance because at the time he was speaking to Pilate, an unbelieving Roman official. And even then, after saying he was born, he adds, “I have come into the world.” He alone of human beings, the God man is the master of his fate. The Son came to give his life, the death being the goal of his life. The ransom is the price of release, the price paid for culprits under judgment. That of course is a reference to us, to you and to me. The ransom is the satisfaction of the divine justice, which requires a life, a life with infinite value for lives. In other words, Christ’s death was propitiatory, Romans 3:24 through 26.

John Calvin was the first to recognize the important distinction in the offices of Christ and to gather the discussion of his mediatorial work around them. He was followed in this by the Lutherans. The priest representing man before God made the reconciling offering called *satisfactio* that is a Latin word that means simply as you probably can tell satisfaction. The satisfaction accomplished by our Lord on the cross effected an expiation of sin and a propitiation of the Father that rendered him able consistent with his perfections in mercy to reconcile us, renew us and finally exalt us to the dignity, excellence and blessedness of the sons of God. It was not our merits then, but our misery that brought him in grace to redeem us.

It is remarkable that the professing Christian church today finds the idea of penal substitution by substitution so distasteful. No two words in the theological vocabulary of

the cross John Stott has said arouse more criticism then satisfaction and substitution. Charles Hodge in his theology devotes three pages to the symbols of the Lutheran Reformed churches that indicate their agreement on the necessity of Christ’s satisfaction of God’s justice in his redemptive work. Even in the Counsel of Trent, the descriptive phrase is found, “Christ Jesus who for our sins has made satisfaction,” *Christos Jesus qui pro peccatis nostris satisfecit*. The very same word from which in Latin we get the word satisfaction.

And finally, he came to give himself a ransom for many. The preposition *anti*, the Greek preposition translated for in this case which ordinarily has the force of in place of it is true, may have the force of in behalf of, Matthew chapter 17 verse 17. But it more commonly has the former sense of in place of. It is the preposition that most clearly expresses the idea of substitution as it does here. Incidentally, would a man who was only a great teacher make such statements as these majestic ones? Matthew chapter 26 verse 27 through verse 28, we by reason of space only briefly consider two other of our Lord’s statements. In the midst of the last supper, he said as he took the cup offered thanks, gave it to them, “Drink from it all of you for this is my blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins.”

As Schilder has pointed out incidentally, if you look back in my history, you’ll see I’ve referred to Schilder a number of times in the past, I pronounced it Schilder, S-C-H, in Dutch, the Dutch, contrary to the Germans like to pronounce the S-C-H, I think out of enmity toward the Germans as Schilder. So I’m calling it Schilder, if you call it Schilder, that’s fine, I did for about twenty years so at any rate when I learned a little Dutch I found that probably was wrong. As he pointed out, two lines meet in the gas chamber where Jesus is seated that of the Old and that of the New Testament. Now the switch is thrown over, fleshly Israel will no longer go up to celebrate the Passover, according to the old law, instead, spiritual Israel and we add believing Gentiles will rise from the table presently, will go out to celebrate Passover of fulfillment, the Holy Supper. The alter of

the Old Covenant vanishes and the table of the new is prepared. But both exist on account of a blood. Up to this time, every eye looked forward, but soon they will look backward. In this holy context our Lord broke the bread and gave his men the cup.

The language of verse 28, “With its blood that is shed,” is sacrificial language as is chapter 20 verse 22 with its cup symbolic of death and judgment. The covenant with the expression forgiveness of sins alludes to Jeremiah 31:34 and the New Covenant. The expression, “My blood of the covenant which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins” may be our Lord’s most important atonement statement. His death is a violent sacrificial death to ratify the New Covenant and its promises, Jeremiah 31:31 through 34. The sense then of the passage is that our Lord’s death is sacrificial and concerns many.

In view of the violent death in sacrificial death, it’s fair to speak of his death again as the penalty paid for sin and the payment is in behalf of many, that is they benefit from his death. This text with the Markan parallels justifies the use of the term substitutionary. For the reference to his death in the words of the supper it seems to me, the term remission, referring to the remitting of merited punishment is a judicial term consonant with the satisfaction rendered to the Father’s justice.

One final text, Matthew 27:46, that is in our Lord’s teaching. Our Lord’s cry of Dereliction, “My God why hast Thou forsaken me?” is the inevitable sequel to the horror that he experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane. See Mark 14:33 and 34 and also verse 36. I shall mention only a few things to underline the claim that the cry itself in its context shrieks penal substitution. In the first place, his “why?” implies conscious innocence of any sin or wrongdoing on his part. Who else among men could honestly take the same position? Further, consider the following questions. First of all would a loving God forsake the only good man who ever lived? Would a loving God injure the only innocent man? Why were his prayers answered else where in fact David’s “Yet Thou art holy,” Psalm 22:3 may be the answer here. The Son has become at the moment he

utters David’s ancient anticipation of Calvary the unholy one, the sin offering, the curse, Galatians 3:13, 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Now the teaching of Paul, Romans 3:21 through 26, these are such great texts, who could ever exhaust them? Even I with my little mind have spent many messages on this one passage. Galatians 3:21 through 26, the normative New Testament text on justification by grace through faith alone is a passage described by more than one older commentator as containing the marrow of theology, or a brief summary of divine wisdom. The interest of this paper however, focuses only on verse 25 and its phrase, propitiation in his blood.” Cranfield’s sense of the passage is that God purposed that Christ be by the shedding of his blood a propitiatory sacrifice. The language is that of penal sacrifice as the term blood indicates. There is no cheap forgiveness nor forgiveness given lightly Cranfield says. Against his Son God directed the full weight of that righteous wrath which they, that is men, deserved, thus he bears the judgment of others. The picture is that of substitutionary sacrifice. The use of the term propitiation or propitiatory sacrifice, the Old Testament term used for the mercy seat perhaps. There’s a significant exegetical debate over this as we could take up two hours just listening to people who have argued this and give their arguments, but we’ll just pass by it so you’ll know that there are other viewpoints. But it is the Old Testament term used for the mercy seat of the Arc of the Covenant of the tabernacle.

At any rate, the term propitiation indicates that the Day of Atonement ritual is in Paul’s mind. Since as we have seen, the ritual looks at the death of the Redeemer to come. Now as we have seen I skipped that passage, but maybe later on if you do read the article you’ll understand the meaning of that. Any way since as we have seen in not as we have seen but as others in the future who will have read about the Day of Atonement will have seen. [Laughter] I’m confusing myself here. [Laughter]

In the ritual, the laying on of hands upon the second goat points to the transference of the guilt of Israel to the animal, the substitutionary sacrifice that stands

typically for the Messiah to come. Romans 8:32, now I hope, you can look at the passages in your Bible I hope, we’ll save time and I’m trying to read fast Gary, hoping to finish. At any rate, Romans 8:32 when Paul comes to the climax and conclusion of his magnificent outline of God’s eternal purpose stretching from divine foreknowledge to predestination, there is a moment of awed silence when as when one catches ones first glance of the Atlantic or the Pacific or when one reaches the summit of a majestic mountain. It’s not surprising that commentators are reserved here; even the apostle reflects this with his, “What then shall we say to these things?”

The next clause, “If God is for us,” may be rendered since God is for us, and the clause is an apt summary of the first eight chapters of the letter. Verse 32 substantiates the sentiments of verse 31 declaring that the God who gave his Son for us, the greatest gift of all cannot logically withhold from us any spiritual blessing. “Having given his best and most, will he withhold the rest and the less?” That verse it should be noticed leans heavily on the Old Testament incident of the offering up of Isaac as the language suggests. The verb translated here as spare is taken from Genesis 22:16 where the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament reads quote, “And you have not spared your beloved son for my sake.” They’re God’s words in that context. The phrase for us all with the proposition *huper* meaning in behalf of refers to the believers according to Doug Mouw, who has written a more recent commentary on Romans. It’s evident that the statement of Paul’s is harmonious with ideas of Penal sacrifice and substitution.

Just a brief word concerning 1 Timothy 2:4 through 6, many of you in this audience of course you’ve had preachers and lecturers explain to you 1 Timothy 2:4,6. But just a few lines with regard to it, the important clause here is the first of verse 6, “Who gave himself a ransom for all,” which is very similar in its sense to Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 which we’ve considered earlier. The language however, is different. It does express very clearly that the one mediator died as a substitute, the noun *antilutron*, The

NASB, the New American Standard Bible renders it ransom, is formed from the noun meaning ransomed and the preposition anti meaning instead or in place of. He gave himself as a redeeming sacrifice in place of and in behalf of all. As the context makes plain, the redemption was accomplished for all kinds of people as Augustine, Calvin and many others have noted. Pass over that problem, just that I’m sure that that interpretation is correct but with one line, I’ve stated it, it could be argued for the rest of the evening I presume.

Revelation chapter 5 verse 9 and verse 10 for the teaching of John, this text is rather interesting. And I’ll spend just a few moments on it. “In which Heaven invests the Lion of the tribe of Judah with authority to establish his dominion over the earth through his coming advent and judgment.” It has been said that the Apocalypse is a long polemic against Domition, the Roman Emperor who plenty called quote, “The beast from Hell,” the first emperor to have himself officially entitled in Rome, god the lord. Here is the answer of Heaven to Domition’s proud claims, the real God the Lord it turns out is a slaughtered lamb who survives and stands as if risen from the dead. The seven sealed book is a testamentary disposition of Earth’s affairs and the goal of history. A prewritten history of the manner of which Christ accomplished his royal office of universal dominion for us described in chapters 6 through 20.

The living creatures and the elders sang when the lamb was seen to take the book from the hand of the one who set on the throne in token to his right to world wide rule. The song extols the lamb’s worth in relation to the past, the present and the future. The source of the lamb’s power and worth is the atonement that he has accomplished. Its features are clear, in the first place, it’s penal. The death that he has died as the lamb is by violence as the word slain and phrase, “With thy blood” indicate. The death is the death of one under judgment. It is as the connection with Isaiah 53:7 indicates, all these little things I don’t have time to talk about. I’m sorry, but I could show that this is verbally connected with Isaiah chapter 53, the reference to which we made earlier. As the

connection with Isaiah 53:7 indicates which in turn refers to Exodus 12 and the Passover, the death of God’s Passover lamb.

In the second place, the death is very clearly substitutionary, just as I pointed out previously in those passages. Third and you Calvinists would appreciate this, it is particular. I want you to notice the partitive expression, “From every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” It does not say that he suffered for, in place of every tribe tongue people and nation. But the partitive expression is from and I’m just going to through this out, most of you haven’t taken Greek, so you won’t appreciate it as much as one who has. What this says is that the death that is referred to in Revelation chapter 5 is a particular redemptive death. From, out from every tribe and tongue and people and nation indicates the scope of the purchase is not universal. In fact, some of our translations have that there were men from every tribe. That’s an attempt to paraphrase a bit, but nevertheless, I think it’s accurate.

We might add one significant thing; the purchase is an effective purchase. All who were purchased become royal priests as verse 9 states, “everyone for whom he died are made priests.” It is an effective purchase. None are lost in the process of redemption. The substitution is I say effective. The chapter concludes with a chorus of praise from all heaven that climaxes in what someone has called an unparallel fortissimo to the Father and to the Lamb who also is worshipped as God. Robert Browning in a letter published after his death cited several utterances of men of genius to the Christian faith and among them one from Charles Lamb, the well known nineteenth century English essayist. Browning wrote, “In a gay fancy with some friends as to how he and they would feel if the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly in flesh and blood once more, on a final suggestion from one of the men sitting and if Christ entered into this room? He changed his manner.” Charles Lamb was a stutterer, so, if Christ should enter the room? He changed his manner at once and stuttered out as his manner was when moved, you see if

Shakespeare entered we should rise, if he appeared, we must kneel.” Yes we must and so we would.

Now, Gary can I have a few more moments to talk about what I really wanted to talk about most? [Laughter] Some theological reflections on substitution and atonement. A few words, concerning theories of the atonement, first a word or two concerning the vicarious repentance theory of McCloud Campbell, Scottish theologian of the last century. The reason I’m paying a bit of attention to McCloud Campbell is because many Scottish theologians, many English theologians and a number of American theologians think this man has given us a theory of the atonement that effectively delivers us from the reformed doctrine of a penal substitutionary theory. When I studied at the University of Edinburgh, both of the currencies believed this theory and urged the students to respond to it.

He was a Scottish Presbyterian minister latter deposed from the ministry for heresy, is the author of a theory of atonement still regarded highly by prominent British theologians such as Thomas F. Torrance and his brother James B. Torrance. Rejecting the penal substitutionary theory and taking a clue from a statement of Jonathan Edwards of all things, who believed a penal substitutionary theory but unfortunately made a little statement that Campbell hit upon and used for the construction of a false theory of the atonement.

Edwards had said, that atonement might be accomplished by quote “either an equivalent punishment or an equivalent sorrow or repentance” unquote. From this, Campbell fashioned his unorthodox theory. He felt that the Son of God in his perfect oneness with the Father must have made that repentant confession, and it must have been quote, “a perfect amen, a perfect amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man” unquote. Thus the mediator chose the second option. “I confess that I’m surprised by Edward’s words.” Brunner’s comment, another rather liberal theologian in many ways, but not all, all of his ways, “What has my present repentance to do with my previous guilt? I am guilty.” I think his comment is correct, the guilt necessitates atonement.

The weaknesses of the theory are many, beginning with the fact that there’s no support at all in specific Scripture for it. Second the heart of the atonement is no longer the cross but the incarnation, while the apostles in their writing although giving the incarnation the high regard the incarnation deserves, have pitched their teaching solidly on the redemptive cross. And third and most devastating of all, if our Lord’s so called vicarious repentance is sufficient for atonement, then the necessity of the cross is destroyed. Christ died needlessly as Paul says in Galatians 2:21 if righteousness should come say from the law instead of from Christ. The thought is mind blowing. “Campbell,” Robert Letham says, “leaves us with the overwhelming center of the Christian faith, the cross, as little more than a frightening charade.”

The governmental theory and evangelicals, and here we come even closer to some of the prominent evangelicals. The great Dutch Jurist, Hugo Grotius, who lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, denied substitution and contended that Christ’s death while not substitutionary served as a way to prevent human moral corruption and to promote the common good. It’s possible for God to relax the law so that an exact penalty is not necessarily enacted for each violation. Grotius used the term penal substitution. You have to watch theologians almost as much as you have to watch preachers, they you have to watch above all, but theologians too. Grotius used the term penal substitution. I can just see people saying, “But my theologian does believe in penal substitution, he just gives it a different sense” but gave it the sense of a substitute for the penalty that should have attached for humanity’s sins.

This device of avoiding penal substitution’s perceived evils is characteristic of Arminian theology. It may be reflected in the theological sojourn of Clark Pinnock. Pinnock has said that he began his theological life as a Calvinist and has now come to an Arminian position. Although historic Arminianism would reject his denial of divine omniscience and perhaps also his more recent deviations, I won’t talk about them. He has explained his transformation from Calvinism to Arminianism as related to his former

belief in substitution. He expressed it in the sentence, “What kind of substitution if unlimited in scope does not entail absolute universalism in salvation?” Now this is the reason Grotius constructed his theory, because he saw if we say Christ died for the sins of all, then we have problems with any theory of the atonement that does not harmonize effectively with the Reformed theory with a few modifications which the reformers would give to that. So, Grotius sought to say Christ did not die specifically for every sin but he died in token of the fact that God would punish sin. You get the point, it shows that God will punish sin but Christ didn’t specifically die for the sins of all.

Now of course we are reformed people here mostly, and of course we believe Christ death was intended for the elect. But Grotius’ theory is an attempt to avoid the teaching of the word of God. Pinnock goes on to say after,

“What kind of substitution if unlimited in scope does not entail absolute universalism in salvation? Obviously it required me to reduce the precision in which I understood the substitution to take place. Christ’s death on behalf of the race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship with God but made it possible (I have a long foot note here and I’m going to read it when I finish this sentence.) for people to enter into such a relationship by faith. It caused me to look again first at the theory of Anselm and later of Hugo Grotius, both of whom encourage us to view the atonement as an act of judicial demonstration rather than a strict or quantitative substitution as such.”

Now I have a little note here which will appear in the paper. I do not have the space in this paper do deal with the position that Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice did not secure an actual salvation for anyone but only made salvation possible to believers. B.B. Warfield has dealt convincingly with this in several places in his writings specifically in his little book, *The Plan of Salvation*. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer who was a strong spiritual

influence on me in my early years and who was indeed a man of faith and a lover of grace spoke of his Calvinism as moderate Calvinism. It was in fact, something similar to Amyrauldianism, but he never used the word, in fact I don't think any of my students ever learned the meaning of that word, Amyrauldianism. But that was Dr. Chafer's view, consistent Calvinism to him was full of “Strained interpretations.” And yet Chafer called the seeming inequity of judgment falling upon a person for whom Christ had born eternal judgment by substitution, “One more mystery which the finite man cannot understand.” Strained interpretations?

“This system,” Warfield said, “was logically inconsistent, unstable, thus untenable. How profitable it would have been to have John Owen's famous conundrum in my schooldays.” The conundrum is an argument constructed by Owen in support of particular redemption. It is often been summarized and printed for handy distribution by those who support Owen's viewpoint. It's an argument that's not yet received an answer, and incidentally, McCloud Campbell said if you accept the presuppositions of Owen, the answer is not found anywhere. It's an unanswerable argument.

Now, just a few comments left. I mentioned that, and I want to say this, I love Dr. Chafer, I look forward to seeing him in Heaven. It's forgotten, he's been attacked recently by a lot of people Michael Horton in particular, has been jumping on him in almost every issue of the reformation review which I take. He's never sat in a class with Dr. Chafer, he didn't know him, all he has is some students who by third hand had once had Dr. Chafer as a student. It's helpful to remember, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer never had a theology class in his life. He never had one in his life. What he did as a simple Bible teacher, who never had a theology class in his life is remarkable. But in this instance and in some others, he was in error. I still regard him as a man of faith and a man of God. He lived by faith he walked by faith, he led that institution without soliciting a single dollar for a number of years. They had struggles, it was the time of the depression, I remember those days, I'm old enough to remember them, and it was tough, but he had tremendous faith

in God. And incidentally, I wish that many of the evangelical ministers of the day would lay off of the postal system and live by faith that they themselves claim is the way by which they live. There are many things they could have learned. But Dr. Chafer was wrong in this respect.

Finally, concerning proclamation, this is the main thing I want to say Gary, so I've got to say it. Substitutionary atonement and the message we preach, if the preaching of Paul to the Corinthians is a model for us, and if that preaching is centered in the cross of an atonement by penal substitution, then may we not conclude that the message of the cross is the declaration that Jesus Christ has discharged all the debts of sin and guilt of those who have believed? In the discharging of all our debts, is the Lord not bound by his own promises to grant believers all the blessings of salvation such as faith, effectual grace, justification, sanctification, redemption?

There are two passages in the New Testament that appear to demand that if he has died for us, all the things remaining for eternal life are a divine warrant for us. The passages are Romans 5:9 and 10 and Romans 8:32 through 34. The latter passage being further strengthened to absolute certainty by the prayers of our great high priest to that end in verse 34, “He that spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” If he loved us enough to die for us everything else must come, conviction for sin, propitiation, all of the things that I just mentioned here that are necessary for salvation. All of those things have to be ours if he really died for us. If he's done the most for us, he'll certainly do the lesser things. That's the point, you cannot escape it.

I know Gary likes this, I think he was the first one who pointed this logic out to me. We are thus led to the dilemma expressed so well by Packer,

“If we're going to affirm penal substitution for all without exception, we must either infer universal salvation or else to evade this inference, deny the saving efficacy of the

“Substitutionary Atonement and Contemporary ‘Evangelical’ Theology” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

substitution for anyone. And if we’re going to affirm penal substitution as an effective saving act of God, we must either infer universal salvation, or else to evade this inference, restrict the scope of the substitution, making it a substitution for some not all.”

The serious present day attack on penal substitution which includes not only Clark Pinnock, but also in a much milder form and apparently wavering, Peter Toon is a return in part to the Sossinianism’s argument that Christ’s substitution is impossible because it’s unjust. There are two passages, Romans 5:8 through 10 and 8:32 that appear to me to be unanswerable texts for Arminians and modified Calvinists. They state plainly that if he gave himself plainly in atonement, everything else must follow, because having done the most he could do, die as our substitute, the lesser things such as conviction of sins, repentance, effectual grace, faith must inevitably follow. The great eternal purpose expressed so beautifully in verses 28 through 30 of the 8th chapter must reach its fruition in the glorification of all those for whom he died. The reality of Christ’s substitutionary death for believers should increase our wonder, inspire our worship and thrill our souls. The Christian who would understand the gospel and present it to others effectively must more fully appreciate this central theological truth which is at the heart of the preaching of the cross.

Well, thank you for laboring with me for so long. Let me close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for the marvelous provision that has been made for us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee that he took our place that he died as a substitute for us, that he was the ransom for our sins. And we thank Thee for the great hope that we have and we pray oh God that Thou will ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]