

THE JUDICIAL AND SUBSTITUTIONARY NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

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THE INDISPENSABLE MESSAGE OF SALVATION

The founding documents of the church leave no doubt that Christianity is a soteric faith — a religion of salvation. The heart of the Christian message is God's promise of salvation through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ; subtract this distinctive, and you no longer have "Christianity" — not the Christianity elucidated in the Old and New Testaments. Biblical Christianity is more than a metaphysical perspective, more than an ethical lifestyle, more than a social phenomenon and movement. At its core, it is a message of salvation, focusing upon the historical individual, Jesus. In Him, declared Paul, all the promises of God were affirmed and confirmed (II Corinthians 1:20).

Accordingly, the Bible calls Jesus Christ our *Savior*. Paul speaks of Him as "God our Savior" (I Timothy 1:1; 2:3; Titus 1:3; 3:4); Peter refers to Him as "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter 1:11; 2:20). Such terminology has extensive New Testament background and warrant. The very reason why God the Father sent His Son into the world is "that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). At His birth it was announced: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). His contemporaries testified: "This is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). And His disciples, those who knew Him best of all, offered the same assessment: "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world" (I John 4:14).

In the nature of the case, then, Christianity is a proclamation of the *good news of salvation*. But just what *kind* of salvation does this entail? It is evident from the epistle to the Galatians that individuals can talk about and propound a "gospel" which is, nevertheless, not truly the good news about God's saving grace in Christ, but a perversion of it (cf. Galatians 1:6-7). Throughout its history, as the church has encountered the world and taken the gospel to unconverted cultures, it has learned over and over again that there are many different conceptions of "salvation" held by unregenerate men which must be corrected lest they undermine and redefine God's intention in the gospel message. Indeed, within the church itself, God's people have always found it necessary to be vigilant against counterfeit and misleading interpretations of the precious words "Jesus saves" — from the corruptions of Rome at the Protestant Reformation to the shameless manipulations of televangelism at the end of this millennium.

Accordingly, we need to ask: from what does Jesus save us, and in what way has He done so?

SIN, GUILT AND WRATH

The Biblical answer is plain and plentiful. Jesus saves us *from sin and its consequences*. God sent the angelic message to Mary: "You shall call His name `Jesus,' for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Here we find nothing less than a fundamental premise of Christianity: "This is a faithful saying, worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15). The Apostle John was equally categorical: "You know that He was manifested to take away sins" (I John 3:5; cf. John 1:29).

Christianity as presented in the pages of Scripture proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Savior, and that from which He saves us is sin.

Naturally, then, it is prerequisite for viewing salvation correctly that we understand what the Bible means by sin. In gaining that understanding, we become aware of the *judicial* character of salvation, for we enter the conceptual sphere of law, guilt, and condemnation — the setting of courtroom, conviction, judgment and penalty.

Paul explained to the Romans that "sin is not reckoned when there is no law: (5:13). God reveals Himself both through the created order (including man's conscience) and through the words of His spokesman — recorded for us in Scripture — as the Lord, Governor and King of the universe. In this position of authority, God promulgates the law to man as a reflection of His holy character and the norm by which man is to guide and direct his life. This law is thus the standard or criterion by which sin is defined and known. As Paul wrote; "through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20), and "I would not have known sin except through the law" (7:7). John put it succinctly: "Whoever does sin breaks the law, for sin is lawlessness" (I John 3:4). To say that all men have sinned is to say that all men have transgressed God's prohibitions and failed to conform to

His demands. They are law-breakers. Because the law reveals God's glorious and holy character (cf. Romans 7:12), those who break the law sin — "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

As the just Judge of all the earth (cf. Gen. 18:25) who cannot tolerate evil (Habakkuk 1:13), God must be true to His own character and impose a penalty upon those who are guilty of violating His commandments. Standing under the moral jurisdiction of God's law, "every mouth may be stopped and all the world brought under the judgment of God" (Romans 3:19). We are, as it were, in a courtroom before an infinitely pure and omniscient Judge. The Psalmist said of Him, "O God, you know my foolishness, and my sins are not hidden from you" (Psalm 69:5). If He were to consider our record of sins, not one of us could stand (Psalm 130:3). Even if we have stumbled at only one point in the law, we are "guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10). Accordingly, we stand under the condemnation of God.

Sin requires divine punishment, for it is an affront to God's righteousness and purity. "The Lord does not leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:7; cf. Nahum 1:3). Those who violate the law of God must face the just consequence of their attitudes and deeds, for sin will bring personal repayment from God. And the penalty cannot be arbitrary or variable (cf. the principle of "eye for eye," *e.g.* Exodus 21:23-25); it must reflect the unchanging and non-negotiable justice of God Himself. The penalty must be exactly what sin deserves, no more and no less. "The wages of sin [in contrast to God's discretionary free gift] is death" (Romans 6:23; cf. Genesis 2:17). "The wicked earn deceitful wages.... He who pursues evil does so to his own death" (Proverbs 11:18-19). "The soul that sins, it shall die.... He shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:4,23). This cannot be otherwise because God is the origin and principle of life (cf. John 1:4), and to turn against Him, then, is necessarily to turn against life. "He who sins against me wrongs his own life; all they who hate me love death" (Proverbs 8:36). God's penalties are never capricious or discretionary (*i.e.*, every transgression receives its just recompense of reward (cf. Hebrews 2:2).

And God's justice must be satisfied. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord" (Romans 12:19; cf. Deuteronomy 32:35). One way or another, recompense will be extracted by God. It is not His nature, unlike fickle or inconsistent humans, to declare a punitive redress and then choose to ignore or relax it: *e.g.*, "the anger of Jehovah will not turn back until He has executed and accomplished the intents of His mind" (Jeremiah 23:20). God's declared intention is to repay all who sin with the penal sanction of death. That is why Scripture asserts with categorical emphasis that the penalty for sin *cannot be mitigated or set aside* in order to save the guilty. God's immutable justice requires the exacting of the punishment which is due to sin: "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22), which the author indicates is true under the law as well as under the gospel). The Biblical principle that remission cannot come without satisfying the demand of death for sin diametrically contradicts the presupposition of "governmental" theories of the atonement. According to them, God is thought to be free simply to forgive sin and to wave off the demands of His law without its sanction (or penalty) being satisfied — were it not for the *consequence* that this would encourage moral laxity. (So God upholds His moral governing of the world by making a public example of suffering, thereby showing how bad sin is and deterring it in others.) However, the justice of God which is relevant to the Biblical doctrine of salvation and atonement is retributive in character, not simply utilitarian.

The *primary* theological truth with which Paul begins his extended elaboration of God's saving grace in Christ is precisely this: "The *wrath* of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Romans 1:18). Eventually the day will come when all men will finally be gathered before the throne of God as their Judge. God "has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained," Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). Books then will be opened, and each man will be "judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). It will be evident that all men have been "storing up wrath against [themselves] for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed. God will give to each person according to what he has done" (Romans 2:5-6). Christ will declare, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Paul explains that "They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power" (II Thessalonians 1:9). John adds the dreadful words that "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

In light of this defining background about law, transgression, guilt, wrath and judgment, we can confidently maintain that "salvation" in the Biblical conception entails man's escape from the judicial condemnation of God. Notice how John clarifies our understanding of the meaning of salvation by his choice of a contrasting term: "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not condemned" (John 3:17-18). We need to be "saved," you see, from God's judicial "condemnation" of our sins. That is why the glorious good news of God's saving work in Christ results specifically in the declaration that "There is therefore now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ

Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Those who are guilty of sin and liable to the condemnation God inescapably pronounces upon it thus need "an Advocate," one who is (unlike them) righteous and can intercede to appease and turn away the judicial wrath of God — becoming, as John puts it, "the propitiation for our sins" (I John 2:1-2; cf. 4:10; Hebrews 2:17).

RESCUED FROM CONDEMNATION BY A SUBSTITUTE

But how can a guilty sinner avert the just condemnation and wrath of God? How can he be set free from the penalty he deserves? Paul wrote: "When the fulness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem them who are under the law" (Galatians 4:4). In order to fulfill all of God's promises and accomplish His saving design for men, Christ came to do a work of "redemption." And in Paul's theologically authoritative conception of this redemption, it carried an unmistakably judicial and substitutionary character: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (3:13). Redemption or liberation is a setting free from a dreadful judicial reality: "the curse of the law." And this act of setting us free was accomplished by a Substitute who assumed the judicial condemnation in our place: "having become a curse for us." Christ's death upon the cross was not simply some "equivalently terrible event" which *replaces* the infliction of the law's judicial penalty (as "governmental" theories of the atonement maintain), but rather the very *bearing* of that curse itself.

According to some versions of non-judicial theology, the curse-bearing character of Christ's redemptive task is shunned in favor of seeing the saving work of Jesus as an act of mediation, an effort "to restore communication between alienated parties." In order to facilitate that restoration, Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, not to bear condemnation, but as payment of the price of reconciling the alienated parties — that is, as a compelling gesture of goodwill. This brings Him credibility and gains a hearing so that the alienated parties will make sacrifices for the sake of better relations. Briefly put, Christ's atoning sacrifice is valued here for its harmonizing influence — its ability to dissipate mistrust and stir up in the hearts of the alienated parties (God and man) a renewed sense of common interests, thus opening the way to better communication. Christ sets the moral example for self-giving, encouraging a better attitude toward God and showing us the way to remove alienation in our personal affairs.

This understanding of the saving work of Christ has a beguiling power and Biblical sound which has subtly drawn away people into theological modernism and neo-orthodoxy (*e.g.*, the *Confession of 1967* in the Presbyterian Church USA.) There is no doubt, of course, that the gospel message can be nicely summarized in these terms: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (II Corinthians 5:19; cf. Romans 5:8-11). However, the Bible never presents the problem which alienates God and man as a mere matter of mistrust and broken communications. Alienation exists because of sin and its guilt. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2). Sin creates objective legal guilt before the Almighty which must be penalized with death; it results in *condemnation*.

For this reason, we cannot escape or downplay the judicial basis for reconciliation as the New Testament presents it. When Paul says in II Corinthians 5:19 that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," he immediately adds *by way of explanation*: "not reckoning unto them their trespasses." Salvation deals with our legal guilt, our trespasses. Paul goes on to say that God's enmity toward us cannot be taken away, thus achieving reconciliation, without resolving the problem of our sin and its condemnation — that is, without turning away God's judicial wrath and making us stand righteous before His judgment. Christ, the One who knew no sin must be "made sin on our behalf" in order that we might "become the righteousness of God in Him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

The redemptive work of Christ was clearly more than an act of representation or mediation, even though Scripture does look upon Jesus Christ as the federal representative of His people and as the only Mediator between God and men. In human transactions, a mediator or negotiator between adversarial parties may facilitate agreement, but he need not *also* — as a substitute for one of the parties (or both) — be the one who performs the service or pays the price involved in the eventual contract or resolution. An attorney can represent his client in a court of law, pleading before the bar, without also as a *substitute* for that client becoming the one who undergoes the punishment imposed by the judge. Christ our Savior did more than represent or mediate for us to God. Isaiah the prophet was granted by God a clear and poignant vision of this truth: "but he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities.... *Jehovah has laid on him the iniquity of us all*" (53:5-6). How shall God's Righteous Servant "justify many"? Isaiah wrote: "it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; He has put him to grief," making his life (or soul) an "offering for sin.... He shall bear their iniquities" (vss. 10-11).

To this the words of the New Testament add decisive confirmation. Christ was manifested at the consummation of the ages, says the author of Hebrews, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," being "once offered up *to bear the sins of many*" (9:26,28). By taking upon Himself the sins of His people, Christ bore the penalty of

death which sin deserves. Jesus said it Himself when He referred to His coming death and interpreted it as "My blood of the New Covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Peter writes that this "precious blood of Christ" was the means of our "redemption" (I Peter 1:18-19). Redemption required that He die as our substitute. Thus Paul describes the Mediator as One who "gave Himself as a ransom *on behalf of* all" (I Timothy 2:5-6). He uses a Greek word for "ransom" whose prefix gives it the literal sense of "substitute-payment." This conspicuously mirrors the saying of Jesus Himself that He came "to give His life as a ransom [release price] *in the place of* many" (Mark 10:45).

The doctrine of penal substitution could be expunged from the Biblical witness only by a resolute mistreatment of the sacred text or a distortion of its meaning. What else could Peter have meant by writing to believers in the church that "Christ *suffered for* you"? The Greek preposition ("for") has the sense of "in your behalf" or "for your sake." Was it simply for the sake of a moral example, so that those who "suffer unjustly" (vs. 19) might "follow His steps" (vs. 21)? Is that the end of the matter (exemplary suffering) or is that not rather the moral *application* of the fundamental saving significance of Christ's suffering? Surely the manner in which Christ died can be a model and even a motivator without at all securing forgiveness or securing ethical integrity; history is full of paradigmatic and pathos-engendering martyrs, while men familiar with them nevertheless continue under the bondage of sin and subject to God's wrath. Peter's explanation of the sense in which Christ, the innocent one, suffered "for" us extends to this precious truth: "who bore our sins in His body upon the tree" (vs. 24). The substituting of the innocent in the place of the guilty, for the sake of rescuing the guilty from condemnation, comes out just a few verses later when Peter declares: "Christ also suffered for sins once, *the righteous for the unrighteous*, in order that He might bring us to God" (3:18).

We see from the above that Christ's atoning death was intended to have an objective effect upon a wrathful Judge (God) and not simply a subjective reverberation in the heart of believers. "Moral influence" theories minimize the significance and uniqueness of the cross by making it merely a compelling *example* of God's great love, emotionally moving men to live self-sacrificially by imitation. Other stories of martyrdom can evoke pathos, but Scripture sets forth the work of Christ as of unparalleled importance. If it was not important because it secured the favor of God, the crucifixion is debased into a senseless act of showmanship. Similarly, "governmental" theories portray Christ's suffering, not as a penal substitution, but simply a penal *example* of sin's dreadful and tragic nature so that divine pardon ("bypassing" the demand for the sinner's punishment) will not have the effect of weakening the honor or enforcement of God's moral demands in the eyes of the public. Society would not take seriously the need to be morally governed by God unless, in the place of punishing sinners as He threatened, God substituted some great measure which was unpleasant and filled with grief. Such speculation, like the moral influence theory, also undermines the significance and uniqueness of the cross. In order to continue providing a deterrent against forgiven men lapsing into sin, God might occasionally repeat penal examples like Christ's suffering throughout history (the more recent and relevant, the better after all) — which is utterly unthinkable in New Testament theology wherein there is absolutely no need for Christ "to offer Himself up often" since His redemptive work was performed "once and for all" (Hebrews 9:12, 25-28). On the deterrent ("sin-prevention") interpretation of the atonement, the crucifixion is debased into a distasteful act of manipulation.

The theological perspective of the Biblical writers — prophets and apostles both bearing witness — is that one who was perfectly righteous stood in the place of those who are unrighteous in God's sight, bearing the curse or penalty of their sin by dying in their place, in order to set them free from condemnation and secure their eternal benefit. There is no other way, as Peter indicates, for sinners to be "brought back to God." This makes maintaining the purity and truth of the gospel as the good news about judicial and substitutionary atonement a matter of infinite personal importance. It makes the self-conscious rejection of this central Biblical theme a matter of dreadful consequence. "For we know Him who said 'Vengeance belongs unto Me, I will recompense'.... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30-31). Our only hope is that Christ's saving death is received by God precisely as a "sacrifice for sins" (cf. vs. 26).

JUSTIFICATION: GOD'S JUDICIAL DECLARATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The judicial (penal) and substitutionary death of Christ for our *redemption* is set forth in the Bible as the necessary prerequisite for sinners gaining a *right standing* before the judgment of God. We are "justified freely by His *grace through the redemption* that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). But how may a righteous God "justify the ungodly" (Romans 4:5)? God's verdict that the unrighteous are judged as righteous in His sight depends on His looking upon the *person and work* of Jesus Christ instead of the sinner's own record. This is how He can remain "just as well as being the justifier" of those who have faith in Christ (Romans 3:26).

God's favorable verdict upon us of justification instead of condemnation requires that He take into account the work of Christ, first that we may be acquitted. This is contained in Paul's short but unforgettable expression,

"justified by His blood," which is the means by which believers are "saved from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:9). Without gaining pardon for their offenses, sinner cannot receive a favorable judgment from God; thus the penalty of sin was discharged by Christ shedding His blood in their place. God's written indictment against us has been blotted out; Christ has "taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). But there is more. God's favorable verdict of justification requires that He take into account the person of Christ, as well as His sacrificial work.

Justification is not simply God's decision to treat the sinner as innocent (acquitted) for the sake of Christ's redemptive work. It also entails the judgment that we are deemed positively righteous in His sight — appraised and declared to be just. This is what it means "to justify." But how can that be a judgment which is according to the truth, unless Christ has become the object of God's assessment *as our substitute* — that is, unless Christ is judged in our place? Paul explains that "of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who was made for us ... righteousness" (I Corinthians 1:30). Despite the unrighteousness of our internal character, when God looks at our *legal record* He finds the righteousness of Christ which is substituted and treated as genuinely our own.

It seriously misconstrues the Biblical testimony to think of this as some kind of "legal fiction." Although the righteousness by which we are justified is an "alien righteousness" because it is that of Christ — certainly not our own accomplishment and not our actual character — it is nevertheless constituted as our very own. God does not see sin and call it righteousness (which would be a lie), but rather when He looks at our record He sees not sin but righteousness, this being the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. The status of our substitute has actually *become our own* status according to the judgment of God. "The one who experienced no sin was made sin on our behalf so that we might in Him become the righteousness of God" (II Corinthians 5:21). In this assertion, the substitutionary nature of our salvation stands out boldly: our sin is imputed to the Savior, while His righteousness is imputed to us.

In this verse, to "become righteousness" cannot by any stretch of the imagination mean that our internal nature has been replaced, "elevated," or "infused" with the actual, sin-free purity, confirmed obedience of and just disposition of Christ Himself. The disappointing personal experience of believers, not to mention the unfailing word of God (*e.g.*, Galatians 5:17; I John 2:1), reveal how preposterous a notion that is. Even more, if II Corinthians 5:21 means that our internal character has been made over into one which is actually righteous, then by parallel the verse would mean — heretical horror! — that Christ lost His holy virtue and righteous disposition when He was "made sin"; He would be construed to have actually, personally become a sinner (or be "infused" with sin).

God's word consistently portrays the judicial or forensic character of justification. The Greek verb ("to justify") itself indicates this. In secular Greek literature, it takes the sense of "to account or deem as righteous," and in the Septuagintal Old Testament it is never chosen in those rare cases where the Hebrew word had a causative meaning (rather than declarative). In New Testament literature, no verb which has the same kind of Greek ending and which denotes moral qualities carries a causative force (*i.e.*, "to make" devout, holy, etc.), but uniformly the sense of "to deem" or assess (as devout, etc.) "To justify" means to *declare* a verdict or *demonstrate* vindicate that someone is just. Earthly judges are required to "justify the righteous and condemn the wicked" (Deuteronomy 25:1), which can hardly mean that the judge "makes" or "causes" the innocent defendant to be righteous. Rather, "to justify" stands in contrast to "to condemn" — to render a negative verdict. When judges "condemn," they do not "cause" the guilty to be made wicked. Likewise, when Paul sets God's "condemnation" of sinners over against "justification" (Romans 5:18; 8:33-34), the latter cannot mean *making* sinner righteous, unless to be consistent (and blasphemous) God is said to have been the cause of the condemned's unrighteous! Justification is God's legal judgment — His pronouncement of the verdict that someone is just in His accounting. The blessing of justification rests "upon the man unto whom God imputes (reckons) righteousness" (Romans 4:6). And as indicated above, such a pronouncement or reckoning envisions a true change, specifically here, of objective legal status for the sinner (not a change of internal moral character or subjective transformation). It is *by faith* that the sinner has *imputed* to his account the righteousness of Christ (faith-righteousness) and henceforth is "reckoned" as righteous (Romans 4:3; cf. 3:22; 9:30; Philippians 3:9). This is "the gift of righteousness" spoken of in Romans 5:17, which must in the nature of the case denote objective bestowal and not inward renewal. Paul subsequently refers to the same theological truth when he affirms: "Through the obedience of the one [Christ] shall the many be *constituted* righteous" (Romans 5:19) — that is, appointed to the standing (status) of righteous (cf. Paul's use of this verb in Titus 1:5, which has numerous New Testament parallels).

From these considerations we learn the distorted character and deadly danger of suppressing the judicial or forensic nature of justification. It refers not to the inward regeneration or sanctifying renewal of the believer (infusion of righteousness), but to God's declaration that the ungodly stands before Him now as just. This

verdict comprehends both the acquittal of the sinner's guilt through substitutionary bearing of the condemnation due and God's accounting of Christ's righteousness as the believer's own new legal status. Since Scripture asserts that God "justifies the ungodly," we know that justification cannot be based on anything in the sinner by which he might boast, whether his faith or his works (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9), both of which are imperfect and tainted in this life. The only hope we can have is that God would look to the righteousness of Christ Jesus our Lord as the ground of His justifying declaration.

The "irreformable" decree of the Roman Catholic Council of Trent pronounced anathema upon anyone who teaches that in justification the justice of God (as "formal cause") looks upon the vicarious righteousness of Christ, rather than the inwardly just character of the believer (infused with sanctifying grace). God's own word, by contrast, anathematizes the latter teaching — whether by Rome or by an angel from heaven — which so thoroughly falsifies *both* the *nature* and *ground* of justification. It is natural that the grace of God and the believer's assurance are so pervasively missing in the Roman Church since it has lost the judicial and substitutionary character of salvation. In short, it has lost the good news (gospel). Praise God for "the abundance of *grace*, even *the gift of righteousness* " by which believers may enjoy "the justification of life (Romans 5:17-18). Because justification is not *grounded* in our faith or works, but rather the perfect righteousness of Christ *apprehended* by faith, we may be confident that "those whom He justified, them He also glorified" (vs. 30) — in which case nobody can lay anything to the charge of God's elect or ever separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (vs. 33-39).

MORE THAN JUSTIFICATION

We recognize, then, that to eradicate the judicial or forensic nature of salvation would be to distort and misrepresent the grace of God in the gospel. Maintaining salvation's judicial character has first-order importance for Biblical orthodoxy. Gloriously, the good news proclaimed in God's word is new about judicial pardon, about a substitute undergoing our condemnation, and about God graciously effecting a legal exchange between the righteous one and the unrighteous many. This is not at all to say, however, that God's saving work for sinners is *restricted* to judicial concerns — that God's only concern is to deliver His people from a guilty verdict and eternal condemnation. Salvation also brings renovation, regeneration — veritable re-creation. As we noted before, the richness of God's mercy is realized in the fact that Christ saves us from sin *and its consequences*. Man's moral dilemma encompasses not only the guilt of sin but also its *pollution* of his character: his waywardness, evil desires, disinclination to good, slavery to sin, or depravity. When our first parents transgressed God's law, sin entered the world, bringing "judgment *unto condemnation* " upon all their posterity (Romans 5:12,16,18). But more: with the guilt of this sin came spiritual death upon all men. "As through one man sin entered into the world *and death through sin...*by the trespass of the one the many died" (5:12,15). Our objective, judicial problem before God brings with it a subjective, internal corruption which is nothing less than complete spiritual deadness. To use Paul's words, prior to God's gracious salvation, we "were dead through trespasses and sin" and were like the rest of mankind "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3). In our natural state, we are slaves to sin (John 8:34), unable to submit to God's law (Romans 8:7-8), and unable to receive the things of God's Spirit (I Corinthians 2:14).

God's grace in Christ saves sinners not only from the objective guilt of their sin, but also from the internal pollution and power of their sin as well. Discussion of this latter blessing would take us beyond the scope of our study into an exploration of regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. Suffice it so say that when God's saving work is finally done, His people will have been delivered from sin *and all of its consequences!*

The point which needs to be made is simply that, while acknowledging (praise God) that salvation has more than a judicial character as presented in the Scriptures, we are untrue to the gospel if we portray salvation as having *anything less* than a judicial character or treat it as somehow a trivial or peripheral concern in the Biblical perspective. Those who are guilty of breaking God's holy law are nevertheless forgiven and declared righteous before the judgment seat of God by faith in Jesus Christ, who bore in their place the condemnation they deserved. How can any true believer be unmoved, indifferent or lack passion about that amazing truth? The judicial and substitutionary nature of salvation is at the very heart of the Biblical gospel. Around this truth evangelicals must unite at the end of the 20th century if we would perpetuate the purity and glory of the good news that "Jesus saves."

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