



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 127

Our studies on the doctrine of soteriology answered the question, “What was needed for the salvation of sinful man?” The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for those whom the Father hath given unto Him” (Chapter 8, Section 5).

Jesus Christ lived as well as died for sinful man, not only delivering us from eternal death, but also gaining for us eternal life. In a previous study the main objections raised against the active obedience of Christ were looked at and responded to. In this study, the main objections presented against the passive obedience of Christ, also known as the penal substitutionary view, are reviewed below.

**Illegal and immoral to punish an innocent party** – A common criticism of this view is that it is illegal and immoral for God to regard the innocent as guilty, and thus to transfer the guilt and punishment of sinners to the innocent party, that is Christ. This would be an act of horrible injustice on the part of God.

In the divine court, God, who was not obligated, was pleased to design and accept Christ’s sacrifice, as the substitutionary payment for sinful man’s moral debt. And Christ Himself displayed His unfathomable love, by voluntarily accepting to sacrifice Himself for sinners, and satisfy God’s justice (Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 3:18). Just as Adam had been placed in the garden as the federal head of all humanity, and just as what he did impacted all of his descendants, Christ, as the last Adam, was likewise sent as the federal head of His people, and likewise what He did impacts all of them. This is seen in passages depicting the parallel between Adam and Christ (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

**God is cruel and vindictive** – Another criticism is that this turns God into a cruel and vindictive Father, guilty of sacrificing His innocent Son for the sins of humanity, demanding blood to satisfy His wrath. What is often ignored is that this was an agreement established in the covenant of redemption, amongst the persons’ of the Trinity, and not just by the Father; which the Son agreed to accomplish willingly. The work of salvation is the willing and harmonious work of the Triune God. If God had responded with His justice alone, then all humanity would have ended up in eternal hell. And God would have been just in doing so. But far from being cruel, out of His immeasurable love, grace and mercy, God provided the only way through which His justice would be satisfied and sinners saved (Romans 3:21-26).

**God could pardon without the need for sacrifice** – It is further argued that if man can simply forgive without demanding any satisfaction, then God who is infinitely greater can do the same, pardoning whom He will by means of His love, without demanding a payment for sin. This denies the objective nature of Christ’s work, and makes the common mistake of elevating one attribute of God above the rest. God is a God of love, but also a God of holiness, justice and wrath. God’s love does not exist in isolation to the rest of His attributes, and He cannot set aside any of His attributes in favor of others.

God, who is the supreme Judge, cannot ignore sin, which is lawlessness and an affront to His holiness and justice. And as the Judge of all the earth He will do what is right (Genesis 18:25; Daniel 9:14; Habakkuk 1:13). God’s wrath against sin actually stems from His love, that is, His love for His holiness, justice and glory. Without justice being satisfied, sin cannot be pardoned, and sinners redeemed.

To sum up, all such objections are unfounded, imposing human opinions upon Scripture. Any view of salvation which excludes the perfect righteous demands of God or the just punishment of sin, has no provision for the satisfaction of God’s justice, no solution to the problem of sin, and no way of removing guilt; and so leaves the sinner without hope – under the wrath of God, guilty and hell bound.