**Jesus’ Sacrifice Makes God Just When He Justifies**

I John 4:10 reads “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” According to dictionary.com the word “propitiation” means “that by which God is rendered propitious, that is, by which it becomes consistent with his character and government to pardon and bless the sinner. The propitiation does not procure his love or make him loving; it only renders it consistent for him to exercise his love towards sinners.”

Romans 3:24-26 bears out that definition by saying “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Paul’s point here?: Jesus dying on the cross allows God to forgive us for our sins while at the same time being consistent with his righteous and just character; meaning he isn’t just “letting us off the hook.” Jesus’ sacrificial death declared God righteous in forgiving all those Old Testament saints (verse 25), and it does the same for believers in our dispensation (verse 26).

So we see true justice (for crime or sin) demands a penalty. God provided his Son to take the penalty we deserve (“God will provide himself a lamb” - Genesis 22:8). It seems my close friend Bob Myhan is overlooking the point of Romans 3:24-26 when he wrote in “The Error of Penal Substitution” the following “Penal Substitution … says that God demands the **payment** of the penalty for sin by a substitute in order to remain just while justifying man. In other words, God cannot justly forgive man unless the punishment for sin is suffered by a substitute for man. And, according to the theory, Jesus is that substitute. He died in your place ... that you ... might be justified … and God might remain just.” As we’ve seen from Romans 3, for God to forgive, penalty for sin had to be paid, else God would prove to be unjust (and capricious) - a concept Bob specifically denies.

This debate goes at least as far back as a discussion that Alexander Campbell had with Barton Stone in the pages of the Millennial Harbinger. Here are a few quotes from Stone in that discussion which succinctly identifies the position this article is intended to refute:

* If the surety pays the debt, due according to law … then is the person free from obligation, and is justified on the principle of law, not of grace; for there can be no grace, pardon, nor mercy in the justifier on this principle. (Millennial Harbinger, Jul 1841)
* If the debt … be fully paid …, where is grace seen in the pardon of the debtor! (Feb 1841)
* … without the blood …, the remission of the least sin could not be obtained, for the reason already given, because none without that blood could be led to believe in him -- none to repent … (Apr 1841)
* The sacrifice of Christ then, in your opinion, has an effect on heaven – on God to propitiate him to man. “To propitiate is to appease one offended, and to render him favorable.” Webster. Do brother Campbell, point us to the scriptures that say that sacrifices either under the Old or New Testament, were ever designed to propitiate God, or that such as effect was ever produced or effected on him. (Mar 1840)
* The death of Christ influences the sinner alone, but produced no direct effect on God. (Feb 1841)
* … all the blood of the universe, the blood of Christ not excepted, could not take away our sin ... (Apr 1841)
* On what grounds was this pardon granted? Not on the ground of sacrifice, but according to the greatness of thy mercy … (Apr 1841)

I agree with what Campbell said in refutation, for example – “no repentance nor amendment of life, without shedding of blood, could obtain remission.” (May 1841) – Heb 9:22b. And I really don’t understand how the following passages teaching Jesus paid for sin can be denied:

* Acts 20:28 Jesus “purchased” the church with his own blood
* Titus 2:14 Jesus did "redeem” us (“… payment …” – Thayer)
* I Timothy 2:6 Jesus was a “ransom” for all (“price” - Thayer)
* I Corinthians 6:20 Jesus “bought” us with his blood (“buy” - Thayer, “to acquire the possession of … by paying … an equivalent” - dictionary.com)

In other words, Jesus paid for our sins instead of us paying for our sins. That’s what’s meant by Substitution. Just a decade or so ago I never would have imagined any gospel preacher feeling forced to deny Jesus paid for our sins. Unfortunately that what’s this issue has come to.