

# Justice and Atonement

by Gerald L. Finneman

Two kinds of justice and their bearing on the atonement are presented in this paper. One kind of justice is poetic; the other is condign. All religions of the world confuse or confound the two. Poetic justice is an imaginative justice. It involves a distribution of rewards and punishments such as is common in poetry and works of fiction. But it is hardly according to the realities of life. Condign justice, on the other hand, has to do with the worthiness or deservedness, of justice. One example is when a prisoner suffers condign punishment, he receives suitable punishment. His punishment fits his crime. He gets what he deserves according to the laws of justice.

Humankind deserves only the grave and the second death. But, One came alongside us. He became one of us. He became us. He substituted Himself in our place. And in this place He vicariously atoned for our sin and guilt setting us free from the condemnation of the law. He justified all by His righteousness. Rom. 5:18.

Pre-1888 Adventism fell into a meritorious system of salvation based on works of the law plus faith. Waggoner presented salvation, from beginning to end, as in Christ crucified as Substitute and Surety Who is to be received by faith which works. The vicarious nature of the atonement was fundamental to the differences between Butler and Waggoner. Butler, while affirming that Christ took the sins of the world upon Himself at the cross, denied the vicariousness of Christ in being made "under the law" for us at His birth. In his letter to Butler, Waggoner quoted and then refuted him concerning this under points 4 and 5:

4. You say: "That he did voluntarily take the sins of the world upon him in his great sacrifice upon the cross, we admit; but he was not born under its condemnation. Of him that was

pure, and had never committed a sin in his life, it would be an astonishing perversion of all proper theology to say that he was born under the condemnation of the law.

It may be a perversion of theology, but it is exactly in harmony with the Bible, and that is the main point. Can you not see that your objection lies as much against your position as it does against mine? You are shocked at the idea that Jesus was born under the condemnation of the law, because he never committed a sin in his life. But you admit that on the cross he was under the condemnation of the law. What! had he then committed sin? Not by any means. Well, then, if Jesus could be under the condemnation of the law at one time in his life, and be sinless, I see no reason why he could not be under the condemnation of the law at another time, and still be sinless. And Paul declares that God did make him to be sin for us ...

5. Again; why was Jesus baptized? He said that it was "to fulfill all righteousness." We may not say that it was simply as an example; for that would be really denying the *vicarious nature of the atonement*. It must have been for the same reason that he died, namely, for sin. Not his own sin, but ours; for as in his death, so in his life, our sins were counted as his. And thus it is that he could be all his life, even from his birth, under the condemnation of the law. It was not on his own account, but on ours. E. J. Waggoner, *The Gospel in Galatians*, pp. 62, 63, Feb. 19, 1887. [Emphasis supplied].

Ellen White, writing four years after the Minneapolis Conference, commented on the ceremonial sacrifices

as types of Christ's vicarious atonement.

The sacrificial offerings which had been instituted to teach men concerning the *vicarious atonement* of Christ, to teach them that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins, had become to them a stumbling block. All that was spiritual and holy was perverted to their darkened understanding." *RH* Nov. 1, 1892. [Emphasis supplied].

Because the Jews lost the correct understanding of the vicarious nature of the atonement they consequently lost the true knowledge of the character of God. The Jewish nation/church adopted the merit system of heathenism. Because of this they crucified Christ, thinking they did God a favor, and thus merited salvation. They convinced themselves they were doing God's will in executing Christ, the assumed blasphemer. And they had Bible proof for their belief and practice!

The merit system the Jews adopted was not unlike the karma principle of poetic justice found in eastern religions. The karma principle is about the merit of human actions, which claims reward on the score of justice. If one is very worthy he is blessed in this life and in the life to come as the just reward based on the merit of his own actions. On the other hand, if he is bad or unworthy, he is cursed with what he deserves in this life and in the life to come as a just punishment based on his own actions. The karma principle is simply cause and effect, sowing and reaping. From this comes the notion of fear of punishment and hope of reward. Religions of the East developed this principle and the church of Rome adapted it and made it foundational to its system. Notice the following comments from *The Baltimore Catechism*, No. 3. The first is from page 160:

The (Apostles') Creed speaks of the

resurrection of the body. It does not mention the soul. because the soul never dies. The body can die because it is composed of material parts. The soul cannot die because it is a spirit. If the soul could die, God would have cruelly deceived us. God put into our hearts a desire to live on and enjoy real happiness. God also gave us a conscience which urges us to do good and avoid evil. But why should we desire to live on and be happy if these desires are useless; why should we be good if being good has no reward?

Question and answer #473, page 161, is concerned with rewards and punishments.

**Q.** What are the rewards or punishments appointed for men's souls at the Particular Judgment [referring to Christ's]?

**A.** The rewards or punishments appointed for men's souls after the Particular Judgment are Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell.

Question #475, page 162, addresses the state and purpose of Purgatory:

**Q.** What is Purgatory?

**A.** Purgatory is a state in which those suffer for a time who die guilty of venial sins, or without having *satisfied for the punishment due to their sins*. [Emphasis supplied].

Earlier, page 45, under question and answer #123 we find the crux of this philosophy:

**Q.** Why did Christ suffer and die?

**A.** Christ suffered and died for our sins. ...

The Cross of Christ does not free us automatically from sin. By His death Christ offered satisfaction to His heavenly Father. God, in return, is willing to forgive and reinstate us in grace, but only if we show ourselves

worthy.

When Christ forgave sins and demanded of us to do penance, to keep the commandments, to receive the Sacraments, to pray and perform good works, He showed that we must cooperate with Him, to have our sins forgiven.

Penance is one of the so-called Sacraments. To the Catholic, it is a method of receiving grace and must be performed when "baptismal grace" is lost through sinning. Penance restores one to favor with God. Baptism and penance are called Sacraments of the dead "because they take away sin, which is the death of the soul, and give grace, which is its life." *Ibid.* p. 71.

Joined to penance is confession to, and forgiveness of sin by, the priest. The priest acting as judge, governed by justice, must forgive sins or refuse absolution, depending on the worthiness or unworthiness of the parishioner.

"In confession the priest acts like a judge. If the penitent is worthy of absolution, the priest is bound in justice to grant it. If, however, the penitent is not worthy of absolution, the priest is bound in justice to defer or to refuse absolution, as the case may demand." *Ibid.* p. 85.

Penance is conditional. You must be contrite. And you must do what the priest instructs you to do, such as to say a certain number of prayers, or do good works. In certain countries the transgressor must be beaten, or must make pilgrimages on his knees over rocks, or climb the "sacred stairs" of Rome on his knees such as Luther did when he went there. According to this philosophy you must atone for your sins and guilt. You must bear your own punishment. To them Christ's work was necessary, but it was only a momentary (and therefore a temporary) measure. If one attains sainthood in this life,

through sacramental grace, he goes directly to heaven at death by his very worthy and holy merit. If he does not become a saint here, but remains faithful to the meritorious system of sacramental grace you still go to heaven, but not directly. He must be rerouted through purgatory. After purgative atonement in that place he is entitled to enter heaven.

Luther rejected and denounced this concept because he believed the teaching of justification by faith. He saw the two doctrines as not compatible on any point. The concept of purgatory is based on the principle found in karma. Purgatory is the conclusion of the karma principle found in all eastern religions and adapted by Rome. As justification is diametrically opposed to purgatory, sacramental grace, and consequent self atonement, so it is against karma, the law of justice, of Eastern religions. The converse is likewise true. Any doctrine that advocates that one must bear the penalty of his guilt in order to atone for his sins is opposed to the gospel of Christ and the teaching of justification (whether corporate or by faith).

Is not any proposition concerning Christ's substitutionary atonement as only temporary and that it is only an example a direct contradiction of Scripture and of the basis of the 1888 message as given by Jones and Waggoner? Whether that teaching of self-atonement is advocated by adherents of Eastern religions, Roman Catholicism, apostate Protestantism, or from some within Adventism, is it not antichrist in principle? This kind of justice and atonement is chimerical in nature. It is not reality. It resides only in the imagination. It is an illusion. The Third Angel's message is the good news of Christ and His atonement and of God's condign justice. God's last day message must be neither confused nor confounded with man's supposed self-atonement and poetic justice.