**The infinite value of Christ’s sacrifice and satisfaction for sins**

Text: Hebrews 9:26

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**Scriptures:** Exodus 34:1-9; Hebrews 9:24-28

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 96, 103, 371, 277, 206

**Series:** Canons of Dort (#5)

**Theme:** The satisfaction of God’s justice through the infinite value of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of many.

**Proposition:** Take heart; Jesus has overcome the world by satisfying God’s justice by substituting Himself for the elect.

**Introduction**

Having a sign outside a church building to draw attention to Jesus Christ and His Word can be helpful to encourage people to visit with us.

* “God expects spiritual fruit not religious nuts”
* “Under the same management for 2000 years”
* “Come as you are; you can change inside”
* “Having trouble sleeping? Try one of our sermons”
* “Sin is a short word with a long sentence”
* Or how about “Jesus died for you”?

You may know that there is a theological problem with the words “Jesus died for you” as a universal statement to everyone. The difficulty is that Jesus did **not** die for everyone. Not all Christians would agree with that statement – which is why we do find some churches who put up a sign outside their building for everyone to read “Jesus died for you”. In fact, of all the five heads of doctrine in the Canons of Dort, the one which is perhaps most disputed is the doctrine of ‘limited atonement’ (the ‘L’ in TULIP).

Particular Redemption or Definite Atonement are much clearer terms than Limited Atonement because “limited” could be misunderstood to imply deficiency in Christ’s saving work. It is this potential misconception that the first four articles of the second head of doctrine (Christ’s death and man’s redemption through it) carefully deal with. We are going to focus on the content of these four articles as we consider our text from Hebrews 9:26: “*he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*”. There are three points in this sermon:

1. The necessity of punishment
2. The satisfaction of Christ
3. The value of Christ’s death
4. **The necessity of punishment**

Punishment is the infliction of a penalty as the consequence for an offence. We are familiar with the connection between justice and punishment. Break one of your parents rules as a child living at home and you will likely be punished by the removal of some privileges, a smack or some additional chores to do. Drive for more than 50m in a bus lane in Christchurch and if you get caught, you’ll be liable to the punishment of a $150 fine. Commit a category 2, 3, or 4 criminal offence and if prosecuted and sentenced, you will almost certainly serve a period in prison.

The principles of punishment are repeatedly revealed in Scripture as a consequence of the just character of God in dealing with crimes against the Lord. For example: **Genesis 2:17** “*but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die*"; **Ezekiel 18:4b** “*The soul who sins will die*”; **Romans 6:23** “*For the wages of sin is death*”

The principles of divine justice are woven into the Old Testament sacrificial system. The writer to the Hebrews recalls the blood of animals that was spilt throughout the history of Old Testament Israel and states that ‘*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*’ (Heb 9:22). Shed blood represented life taken as a penalty for sins against God. The Canons of Dort, drawing on the Scriptures, state that God’s justice ‘*requires that our sins, committed against his infinite majesty should be punished not only in this age but also in the age to come, both in body and soul*’.

Death is not only physical. It is not merely the loss of life from the body as evidenced by a heart that no longer beats, lungs that no longer take breaths and a brain that is no longer active. Death is also spiritual because we are composed of both body **and** soul. Spiritual death is the state of being separated from God. Spiritual death is being apart from the source of all life, all that is good, true and ultimately satisfying.

When the Canons of Dort refer to punishment ‘in this age’ this speaks of the temporal justice of God whereby people suffer at times from the consequences of their sins. The Scriptures express this in Romans 1:24 “*God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves*”. Sometimes we may experience the consequences of our breaking of God’s law in this life, thereby ‘*reaping what we have sown*’ (Gal 6:7).

We need to be very careful with this though. When we suffer physically, mentally, emotionally and/or physically this **may be** the result of sinful or unwise actions in our lives. However, it may be the consequence of the sins of others, or come into our lives as part of the general groaning of this creation as a result of the entrance of sin into this world (Rom 8:22). For those who have turned to Christ in repentance and faith there is now no condemnation by the perfectly just Lord (Rom 8:1). Brothers and sisters, the consequences of our sins that we may experience in our lives are **not** punishments from God. Because His supreme justice has been satisfied in Christ (more about that in our second point!), these painful consequences become means that He is pleased to use for our good (Rom 8:28). For me, and I think for many other Christians, some of the most powerful works of God’s grace in my life have come as I have gone through suffering that has resulted from my own stupidity and sin and I have grown spiritually as a result. How about you?

When the Canons of Dort refer to punishment ‘in the age to come’ they are not referring to the false idea of purgatory. Purgatory is the place where the Roman Catholic church teaches that the spirits of dead people are sent to suffer for their sins before they go to heaven. All those who remain under God’s perfect judgement experience the eternal punishment of the torment to body and soul that is the essence of being separated from God. They will also have come to realise and confess His glorious perfection and know that they are forever apart from Him (e.g. Phil 2:) This is the punishment of God ‘in the age to come’. But all those who receive God’s saving mercy in Christ do not suffer punishment ‘in the age to come’, they only experience pure and complete joy and perfect pleasure in the presence of God forever. This is only possible because of the satisfaction of Christ – which brings us to our second point.

1. **The satisfaction of Christ**

Sometimes guilty people escape just punishment for their crimes. They might not be caught, convicted and sentenced. They might bribe a judge or jury. They might bring false witnesses to testify for them. They might break out of their prison cell.

In contrast, nobody can avoid God’s just judgement unless the righteous demands of His justice are fully met. The Canons of Dort put it this way “*We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is made to the justice of God*” (Art 2:1). The English word ‘satisfaction’ has two meanings:

* Fulfilment of one’s wishes, expectations or needs. When your stomach is full of good food you feel satisfied with a meal you’ve just eaten.
* The payment of a debt or fulfilment of an obligation. The bank claim on your home is satisfied when you pay off all your mortgage.

The Canons of Dort use the word in this second sense. The writer to the Hebrews knew that the Old Testament sacrifices were all insufficient to provide a way of escaping God’s judgement. “*For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*” (Heb 10:4). We could say that all those animal sacrifices were worthless currency for purchasing God’s forgiveness by satisfying justice, they were really just like IOUs. An IOU acknowledges a debt which is **yet to be paid**. That is why the Old Testament priest had to enter the holy place in the temple every year to make a sacrifice. This was a repeated symbol and reminder that satisfaction for sin was necessary, and that payment was outstanding.

In contrast, the writer to the Hebrews reveals that Christ did not enter into the holy place in the physical temple to make a priestly sacrifice, but that He has entered into the very presence of God in heaven. His satisfaction is complete because “*he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*” (Heb 9:26). The Canons of Dort state that God ‘*in his infinite mercy has given his only begotten Son as our* ***surety***’ (Art 2.2).

The word ‘surety’ is used in the world of finance to describe a bond or guarantee which involves the promise of one person (or party) to assume responsibility for the debt of another. Sometimes parents will become guarantors of their children’s home loans, agreeing to pay their debt if the bank forecloses on their loan. Legally providing surety for a debt is similar to becoming a guarantor, but generally carries a greater liability on behalf of another.

The satisfaction that Christ has made was not made for Himself, for He had, and has, absolutely no debt with God the Father. The Scriptures say it this way “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). Christ’s satisfaction was made on behalf of others (CofD Art 2:2).

In the film industry, stunt doubles are used to stand in for actors. They perform in scenes where there is a significant danger of injury or death. They are generally more skilled in these roles than the mainstream actors. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Calvary was no stunt in a movie, it was a real historical event at the centre of God’s plan of salvation for all His people. We could say that Jesus was ‘more skilled’ than those he ‘stood in for’ because (in the words of CofD 2.4) He is ‘*not only a true and perfectly holy man but also the only begotten Son of God*’. He suffered death in the place of others so that they would not have to die. He satisfied the right demands of God’s perfect justice by receiving the punishment that was due to others.

His satisfaction was (in the words of CofD2.3) ‘*sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world*’. ‘Expiate’ is another word for ‘atone’ which means ‘to make amends or reparation’. The satisfaction of Christ on the cross unto death was a ‘substitutionary atonement’. Christ substituted Himself for sinners like you and me and paid the price to cancel our debt with God so that we could live. In this way God’s supreme justice was satisfied and God’s supreme mercy was received by His elect.

The question that the first few articles of the second head of doctrine in the Canons of Dort answer is ‘*was the value of Christ’s substitutionary atoning death then limited because his death has not resulted in the salvation of all people?*’ The answer is the subject of our third point:

1. **The value of Christ’s death**

The Canons of Dort are very careful to explain that there is no lack of value in Christ’s atoning death. ‘Limited atonement’ does **not** mean that there was insufficient capacity in Christ’s work to save more people than only God’s elect. Limited atonement does **not** mean that Christ was only able to save some because there wasn’t ‘enough sacrifice to go around’; not enough ‘satisfaction for everyone’s debt’. The value of Christ’s death is infinite – without limit - because not only is He a perfect man and also the only begotten Son of God, He also bore ‘*the wrath and curse of God which we by our sins had deserved*’ (Cof D Art 2:4).

Divine wrath is of a power, ferocity and fury that is beyond our imagination. We know something of the destructive power of storms, earthquakes, tsunamis and erupting volcanoes. With powerful telescopes we can observe the catastrophic exploding of stars which become supernova and increase dramatically in brightness. However, it is beyond our comprehension to fully understand the wrath of God. The book of Hebrews reveals that “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb 10:31) and that ‘*our God is a consuming fire*’ (Heb 12:29).

The experience of the fury of divine wrath against sin was expressed in these awful words of Christ: "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt 27:46). The very creation revealed the curse unleashed on Christ at the cross as there was ‘*darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour*’ (Mark 15:33).

The limited scope of Christ’s atoning work was not due to a lack of value in His death, but rather a result of God’s decree of election. This is described in Art 2:8 which says, “*God willed that Christ through the blood of the cross should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation and tongue all those,* ***and those only****, who from eternity were chosen to salvation and were given to him by the Father*”. The doctrine of limited, definite or particular atonement is a necessary consequence of the Biblical doctrine of election. However, just as this does not mean any limit to the value of Christ’s sacrifice and satisfaction for sins, neither does it mean any limit to the extent to which the gospel should be proclaimed. We’ll look at this in more detail in the next sermon in this series.

The Bible clearly reveals that ‘“*God is not only supremely merciful but also supremely just*” (CofD Art 2:1). We saw this in our reading from Exodus 34:1-9 where the requirements of God’s justice did not change because the first stone tables of the law were broken, but the Lord’s perfect kindness was revealed “*The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness*” (v6). Moses pleaded with God “*pardon our iniquity and sin, and take us for your inheritance*” (Ex 34:9). This is what God has done through the infinitely valuable, substitutionary sacrifice of Christ who has made complete satisfaction for the sins of all God’s elect.

So brothers and sisters in our Lord, take heart: Jesus has overcome the world by satisfying God’s justice by substituting Himself for the elect. Unbelieving friend. The work of Jesus is all-sufficient to save you. If you come to Him in true repentance and faith, then you can be sure that you are one of those for whom Christ died. So come, whilst there is yet time, for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God without the blood of Christ to save you from His wrath.

Here’s a sign suggestion for our street sign “Come in and find out if Jesus died for you – we believe in limited atonement here”. It may not be as catchy as some other church signs, but it is true 😊.

AMEN.