

## McLeod Campbell, Edwards and Atonement

By Jeffrey A. Stivason

This paper will analyze and critique J. McLeod Campbell's rejection of Christ's penal suffering as specifically developed by Jonathan Edwards as well as Campbell's reconstruction of Christ's suffering in non-penal terms. The backdrop for McLeod Campbell's repudiation of Christ's penal suffering was an attempt to quell the fears of his parishioners who struggled with the assurance of God's love and the nature of forgiveness in light of the Calvinistic doctrine of election and limited atonement.

The research will take shape according to the following outline: firstly, a survey of the theological landscape, with special emphasis on the atonement, will be presented. Secondly, Campbell's rejection of the penal suffering of Christ, per Edwards, will be considered in light of his concern for the sinner, which will be followed, thirdly, by an outline and critique of his so-called retrospective aspect of the atonement. This particular aspect of Campbell's theory was meant to reconstruct the suffering of Christ in non-penal terms and thereby allay the fears of the sinner while at the same time providing them with comfort.

### The Theological Landscape in Regard to the Atonement

In 1831, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland deposed J. McLeod Campbell from the ministry, having found him guilty of heresy due to his teaching on the assurance of faith and the unlimited nature of the atonement. However, according to Campbell, the extent of the atonement was a point of secondary importance in relation to what really needed theological reconsideration, namely the nature of the atonement.<sup>1</sup> According to him, once the nature of the atonement was understood the assurance of God's love would inevitably follow, along with an understanding of its universal scope.<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, Campbell's concern was pastoral. The opening chapter of *The Nature of the Atonement* establishes the awakened sinner, or the person who apprehends his own sinfulness, at the center of the discussion. And for Campbell, the sinner's situation was plain; all the divine attributes of God were at one and the same time against him and called for a due expression of God's wrath against him as a sinner. For Campbell "the wrath of God against sin is a reality" (Campbell, 47, 51, 117). Thus, again according to Campbell, it is not a delusion to argue that Christ's death was a satisfaction for sin on behalf of the sinner (Campbell, 117). Sin is truly man's dilemma, as the Scottish preacher perceived it.

However, according to McLeod Campbell, there was another, often neglected, side of the Godhead to

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1. J. McCleod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 35. The controversy surrounding the extent of the atonement and the assurance of faith within the Scottish church began with the Marrow controversy of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, when the church condemned Campbell's teachings as heretical they enlisted the ruling of the General Assembly that also condemned the work which was at the heart of the Marrow controversy, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* published by Edward Fisher in 1645. Works that ought to be consulted on issues of atonement in the theologies of Edwards and McLeod Campbell are Michael Jenkins, *A Comparative Study in the Theology of Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and John McLeod Campbell: Atonement and the Character of God*. San Francisco, CA: Mellen Research University Press, 1993. Also, Oliver Crisp's "Non Penal Substitution," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 9, issue 4 (Oct. 2007): 415–433.

2. Campbell was not alone in positing the unlimited scope of Christ's atonement. Thomas W. Jenkyn and Ralph Wardlaw stated similar notions in 1837 and 1844 respectively.

consider. God not only took a posture of wrath toward the sinner; He also desired his salvation (Campbell, 51). Campbell knew that the Scriptures taught that divine love toward the sinner preceded Christ's atoning death. Thus, he posited that such an understanding of God's benevolent posture toward sinners precludes us from understanding Christ's death as the mechanism by which God starts to love those whom He once hated. As Campbell puts it, "If God provides the atonement, then forgiveness must precede atonement; and the atonement must be the form of the manifestation of the forgiving love of God, not its cause" (Campbell, 45). Obviously Campbell's point is simply a reflection of various Scripture texts, such as Romans 5:8 and Ephesians 1:4–5, that teach this very notion. Moreover, in an attempt to conjure intramural support, Campbell could have easily appealed to the words of Calvin, who wrote,

The fact that we were reconciled through Christ's death must not be understood as if his Son reconciled us to him that he might now begin to love those whom he had hated. Rather, we have already been reconciled to him who loves us, with whom we were enemies on account of sin.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, for McCleod Campbell, these two postures needed to be held with equal tension. One could not be presented to the exclusion of the other, nor could one be stressed to the neglect of the other, for such a distorted presentation could only lead to despondency in regard to the sinner.

However, as Campbell saw the theological landscape of his day, despondency among awakened sinners was a reality due to the unbalanced presentation of God's character. As Campbell saw it, God's all-consuming wrath was emphasized to the exclusion of His love, a direct result, or so Campbell thought, of what he called a modified Calvinism that was codified in the work of the Westminster Assembly and which had been promulgated by Reformed theologians ever since. But more than being wholly incongruent with Calvin himself, Campbell perceived this modified system as having subversive pastoral implications.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill; Trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:507.

4. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr; Trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1994), 2:176.

5. Campbell, 50. Cf. Hodge's *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:511. "The ultimate design of the work of Christ is, therefore declared to be to 'bring us to God;' to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

For Campbell, to emphasize the wrath of God against sin without also emphasizing the love of God in providing atonement created an unnecessary wall of division between God and the awakened sinner. For him, such a one-sided presentation portrayed an angry, despotic God needing to be made gracious rather than manifesting the God of Scripture whose love was the cause of the atonement (Campbell, 46). Consequently, Campbell thought that for a sinner to be awakened to the fact and fullness of his sinfulness in the face of such an angry God would only lead to despair.

But Campbell's dissatisfaction went beyond objections to a one-sided presentation of the predisposition of the divine attributes. Modified Calvinists, according to their own testimony, could hold both God's wrath and His extension of love in the atonement in adequate tension to one another. For instance, the prominent seventeenth century Protestant scholastic Francis Turretin affirmed that the sinner was unable to "approach in any way a most just and holy God except as he is a merciful Father and Redeemer – as offended, indeed, but as to be appeased, who through his love of benevolence wished to reconcile offending men to himself."<sup>4</sup> But, according to Campbell, when God's wrath is stressed to the exclusion of His love, as he maintained it was, pointing to modified Calvinism's emphasis on limited atonement as evidence, the balance in presentation claimed by such Calvinists is only an illusion.

Consequently, the sinner is unable to believe the overtures of a God predisposed to love and forgive, because the gospel is put forth with an emphasis on clemency and pardon rather than adoption and sonship. In other words, scholastic Calvinism emphasized God's wrath to the neglect of His love, and was, for that reason, constrained to give undue weight to Christ's having fulfilled the law rather than on His bringing us to God as adopted children.<sup>5</sup> For Campbell this legal emphasis was nothing but misguided.

Moreover, as a result of modified Calvinism's undue emphasis on God's wrath toward sinners while also affirming God's extension of love and forgiveness in Christ's atonement, Campbell concluded that they had been caught in a contradiction. For if, by sin, the wrath and curse of God extended to all, then why did the benefits of Christ's atonement not extend to all? According to Campbell, love is the one attribute of God that stands above all others; not justice, as modified Calvinists seemed to claim, which only eclipsed the love of God altogether and brought the awakened sinner to a state of dejection (Campbell, 73).

Thus, in order to present a balanced understanding

of God's posture toward the sinner, Campbell believed that it was necessary to establish what he called a faith that must precede the faith of atonement—that is, we must believe that there is forgiveness with God, and that toward all men.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, says Campbell,

Surely the demand for the faith that there is forgiveness in God has a response in conscience; and doubtless it is, in part at least, ignorance of God that causes the difficulty in believing in forgiveness, which is felt when an actual need of forgiveness that shall be purely such, is realized. For it ought not to be difficult to believe that, though we have sinned against God, God still regards us with a love which has survived our sins (Campbell, 45).

For Campbell the “ignorance of God that causes the difficulty in believing in forgiveness” is the overemphasis of modified Calvinism on God's justice and wrath to the exclusion of God's love, which sent Christ into the world, showing that there is indeed forgiveness with God for all men.

Furthermore, Campbell not only believed that modified Calvinism possessed an unbalanced view of God's relationship with the sinner, he also believed that it misunderstood the nature of the atonement, that is, how wrath was to be appeased and what would meet such a righteous demand from God (Campbell, 117). According to modified Calvinism, said Campbell, all the suffering of Christ's life from the manger to the cross is to be considered penal in its nature, the punishment of the sins of the elect.<sup>7</sup> And with this Campbell did not agree. But why did he reject such a well-established notion explicitly taught in the creeds as based upon Scripture?

For Campbell the idea of penal substitution was not the Calvinism of Calvin; rather, it was a direct outgrowth of modified Calvinism and, to his way of thinking, it was neither biblical nor logical. According to Campbell, the chief proponents of the penal substitutionary theory were John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, though Owen did not explore the nature of Christ's suffering to the depth that Edwards did (or so thought Campbell). But both Edwards and Owen had ingeniously and tirelessly represented this new form of Calvinism that had been codified in the creeds of the Church, specifically the Westminster Confession of Faith. Thus, a look at Campbell's critique of Edwards' fuller treatment of the penal suffering of Christ may serve to help understand Campbell's rejection of the theory.

### Campbell's Rejection of Edwards' Concept of Penal Substitution

According to Campbell, the penal substitution theory of the atonement that Edwards and other so-called modified Calvinists advocated was built upon the faulty ground of imputation. However, the vicarious penal suffering of Christ and its imputed benefits was, for Campbell, not adequate to answer the question, “How is the wrath of God to be appeased?” Nor could such a notion be adequate, so long as modified Calvinists continued to inadequately define Christ as having been treated as if he had been what he was not. Campbell complained that vicarious penal suffering did nothing but reduce the work of Christ to a legal fiction, only affecting the Christian externally, rather than something apprehended internally, which is what Campbell said Christians prize the most (Campbell, 36). But what did the Scottish preacher see as problematic?

Campbell thought that, if it were true that God had imputed our sins to Christ and thereby the Savior received the punishment of the sins of the elect, then Christ could only be regarded as a mere substitute for the execution of the law.<sup>8</sup> Such an understanding was abhorrent to Campbell, who thought that, rather than

6. Campbell, 45. On page 69, Campbell critiques Owen, stating that, Owen “denies that any man is asked to believe, as the first act of faith, that Christ died for him in particular, or to believe anything but what he recognizes as actually revealed.”

7. Campbell, 68. According to William Symington, another Scottish preacher, in his *The Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ*, “The whole of Christ's sufferings are comprehended in the matter of his atonement. It was not by those of his soul to the exclusion of his body, or by those of the latter period of his life on earth to the exclusion of those of an earlier date, that he effected the purchase of our salvation. All were necessary, from birth to his death, from the feeble cry of infancy to the piercing complaint of desertion” (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2006, 153). This was also the view of the Protestant Scholastics. Francis Turretin writes, “The satisfactory sufferings of Christ must be extended to all those which were inflicted upon him, not only on the cross, but also in the garden (yea, through his whole life),” 2:446.

8. Campbell, 140. Campbell appears to confuse Edwards' position at this point when he writes, “Both Edwards and Payne regard the work of Christ as the meritorious ground of justification.” And just a paragraph later, “The difference between their several systems is connected with the idea of imputation. As Edwards holds man's guilt to have been imputed to Christ when He suffered for sin, so he hold Christ's righteousness to be imputed to believers....” However, in Edwards' treatment of the nature of Christ's suffering, he writes antithetically to Campbell's claim, “The satisfaction of Christ, by suffering the punishment of sin, is properly to be distinguished, as being in its own nature different from the merit of Christ.” On this point Campbell has not read or has misread Edwards, who sees the suffering of Christ as fulfillment rather than merit, at this point.

view Christ's sufferings as meeting the demand of divine justice, His work must be understood as an expression of the divine mind regarding our sins. Likewise, the righteousness of Christ that is given to all men, according to Campbell, is "NOT the *past fact of legal obligation discharged*, but the *mind of sonship towards the Father*." Thus, to regard Christ's suffering as suffering to meet the demand of divine justice reduces Christ to a legal substitute and thus the sum benefit of His work amounts to little more than legal fiction (Campbell, 117, 140).

Furthermore, even if imputation were conceded, the awakened sinner would still be left wondering how such a transaction could be possible. That is, how could it be possible that guilt and innocence or sin and righteousness are transferable in their effects but not transferable in themselves, a position that Campbell maintained underlies the whole system of modified Calvinism (Campbell, 93)?

Holding to an untenable theory of imputation was the major criticism Campbell leveled against Edwards. But Campbell's analysis went beyond a legal critique of imaginary benefits; he offered another argument rooted in ontology. How could our sins have been imputed to the Son of God so that he was treated as a sinner and punished by His Father, thereby suffering in our stead? How could such a notion hold true with regard to the ontological Trinity?

According to Campbell, Edwards had failed to seriously consider an idea that the American Puritan himself had suggested, that is, God was not angry with Christ personally and Christ knew it.<sup>9</sup> Consequently,

9. *The Works of President Edwards*, (New York: Jonathan Leavitt and John F. Trow & Co., 1843), 1:602. The editors of Campbell's book state in a footnote on page 65 that Campbell was likely using this four volume edition.

10. Campbell, 89–90. After dealing with a series of modified Calvinist authors on this point, Campbell writes, "My quotations are necessarily brief, but the references will guide those who may be disposed to verify the correctness of the impressions which these quotations convey. What remains with me, after fully weighing all that either school of Calvinists have felt warranted to present to our faith in picturing the actual elements of the sufferings of Christ, is the conviction that they have not ventured to assume anything as to the actual consciousness of Christ in suffering, or as to the actual mind of the Father towards Him..."

11. For Campbell, this seems to be true for any system holding to penal suffering "whether they be held as by Owen, to have been the same that those for whom he suffered were obnoxious to;—or as Baxter, with Grotius, held—equivalent;—or as Dr. Jenkyn holds, 'different in nature, and kind—in quantity and degree'" (Campbell, 84).

12. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:603.

13. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:603.

14. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:604.

Campbell wondered how Edwards could maintain that the Father treated the Son as if He were a criminal. What is more, how could the Son, knowing the love of the Father, actually feel as if He were the recipient of divine wrath?<sup>10</sup> For Campbell, any such notion was ontologically impossible and consequently, for the Scottish preacher, legal imputation and Christ's penal suffering as a result did not merely constitute a legal fiction but yet another contradiction for orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup>

Having these points of criticism firmly fixed in our minds, let us examine Edwards' two important comments on the penal suffering of Christ; for, as Edwards saw it, Christ could only have suffered in the two subsequent ways.

Edwards said, firstly, that Christ's great love and pity to the elect was one source of his suffering.<sup>12</sup> However, in order to elucidate this aspect of Christ's torment, he made two additional sub-points. According to Edwards, Christ's pity was due to His comprehension of the odiousness of sin and how it deserved to be punished.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, by having these sins laid upon Him, Christ was able to comprehend the weight and pressure of these sins, which were measured by his infinite holiness.<sup>14</sup> Thus, according to Edwards, Christ's pity as He looked upon the nature of sin and the punishment that it deserved was the first source of his suffering in regard to the elect, as explained in these sub-points.

Obviously, Campbell did not perceive the suffering pity of Christ for the elect as constituting punishment; on the contrary, he observed, "The sufferer suffers what he suffers just through seeing sin and sinners with God's eyes, and feeling in reference to them with God's heart. Is such suffering a punishment" (Campbell, 107)? According to Campbell there could only be one answer:

Reflecting on that answer, and seeing it to be impossible to regard suffering, of which such is the nature, as penal, I find myself forced to distinguish between an atoning sacrifice for sin and the enduring as a substitute the punishment due to sin – being shut up to the conclusion, that while Christ suffered for our sins as an atoning sacrifice, what he suffered was not – because from its nature it could not be – a punishment.

After further clarifying the question for his readers, Campbell again asks,

The question to which I have led you is this: The sufferings of Christ in making His soul an offering for sin being what they were, was it the pain as pain, and as a penal infliction, or was it the pain as a condition and

form of holiness and love under the pressure of our sin and its consequent misery, that is presented to our faith as the essence of the sacrifice and its atoning virtue (Campbell, 107)?

Admittedly, for Campbell, this question is a crucial point in his argument against the penal nature of Christ's suffering (Campbell, 107–108). Furthermore, Campbell argues that keeping this question in mind will gradually help the reader to understand that the nature and essence of Christ's sufferings were spiritual and not penal. By "spiritual," Campbell seems to modify and adopt what Edwards described in his first point, that is, Christ's suffering was nothing more than an expression of pity, rather than the result of God's anger and wrath poured out in order to reclaim some legal obligation on behalf of sinners.

Campbell, however, did not deal with the second point of Edwards' twofold answer; rather, he confined his comments to the twofold division of Edwards' first point. Critics have failed to notice this omission. But the negation is interesting in light of the following earlier statement made by Campbell while critiquing Edwards on the nature of Christ's suffering. Summarizing Edwards' view of Christ's penal affliction, Campbell wrote,

After premising that "Christ suffered the wrath of God for men's sins in such a way as He was capable of, being an infinitely holy person who knew that God was not angry with Him personally – knew that God did not hate Him but infinitely loved Him," he goes on to specify *two ways* in which he conceives that Christ could endure the wrath of God. But the elements of suffering which he specifies, however connected with the sin of those for whom Christ died, cannot be recognized as the punishment which they themselves were bound to undergo – if such sufferings can rightly be presented as punishment at all.<sup>15</sup>

Here, Campbell seems to suggest that the two sub-points of Edwards' first main point are all that Edwards had to offer in order to explain the vicarious penal suffering of Christ. Campbell makes no mention of Edwards' second major point on the subject. Nevertheless, Campbell draws the following conclusion: "The teaching that substitutes, 'enduring the punishment for our sins,' for, 'being punished for our sins,' has still to seek for elements of penal suffering..." (Campbell, 88).

However, according to Edwards, the second "way in which it was possible that Christ should endure the wrath of God was, to endure the effects of that wrath."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Christ not only perceived God's wrath intended for sinners but also, according to Edwards' second point, He experienced its effects. In other words, according to Edwards, Christ was not a criminal but was in fact treated as though He were one. For Edwards, what he had outlined was nothing more or less than an orthodox understanding of imputation.

Consequently, it appears that Campbell has fallen victim to what he has unceasingly criticized, that is, a tendency to emphasize or neglect one aspect of the argument to the exclusion or oversight of the other. Campbell, whether intentionally or not, does not permit Edwards to speak fully on this issue. Nor does Campbell even intimate that Edwards has anything more to say on the matter.

Quite clearly, Campbell has neglected an important element of Edwards' argument in favor of the penal aspect of Christ's suffering, for it is here that Edwards undertakes to answer Campbell's ontological objection—that is, how could the person of Christ have suffered the effects of God's wrath?<sup>17</sup> But perhaps Campbell was unwilling to bring out those views of Edwards that would have at least tempered his argument, because he was about to use Edwards to construct a theory wanting of penal suffering.

### Campbell's Retrospective Aspect of the Atonement

Leaving Edwards' second point untreated Campbell takes up the work of reconstructing a theory of the

15. Campbell, 69–70 (emphasis mine).

16. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:606

17. Interestingly, both Campbell and Edwards separate the deity from the humanity of Christ when discussing the nature of Christ's suffering. "Yet," says Hodge, "Christ is but one person, with two distinct natures, and therefore whatever can be predicated of either nature may be predicated of the person" (*Systematics*, 2:483). Though Symington struggles with the same question, he concludes, "Although the human nature was alone capable of suffering, it was nevertheless the person whom this nature belonged to suffer" (*The Atonement*, 164). John Pye Smith in his *Four Discourses on the Sacrifice and Priesthood of Jesus Christ and on Atonement and Redemption* (London: B. J. Holdsworth, 1828), 66–67 writes, "In those respects in which the sacrifice of the Messiah implied suffering, it could attach only to his human nature. The Divinity is not susceptible to pain or death.... Though only the pure and perfect human nature of the Messiah could suffer, it is obvious that all the acts and sufferings of that human nature, by reason of its union with divine nature, come under a *relative consideration* very different from that which similar acts and sufferings could have in any mere man. Analogies must, of necessity, be deeply defective. The transcendent case before us is absolutely sui generis; and all our reflections upon it should be conducted with the most cautious reverence, and with an anxious adherence to the light of revelation."

atonement devoid of penal suffering and actually employs Edwards' thought in the undertaking. However, the task of repudiating the theory of the modified Calvinists that had been embedded in the Westminster Confession was not to be an easy one. Campbell would have to deal with three major points: firstly, the relational disruption between Father and Son as taught by Westminster Calvinism; secondly, repentance as the atoning element of Christ's redemptive work; and finally, what it means to endure the punishment for our sins, over against modified Calvinism's assertion that Christ was punished for our sins.

#### THE ONENESS OF MIND BETWEEN FATHER AND SON

For Campbell a biblical theory of the atonement must leave the relationship of the Father and Son intact while dealing with sin on man's behalf, something that he thought Edwards had failed to accomplish. Thus, Campbell's theory, which he called the retrospective aspect of the atonement, begins with an understanding of what constitutes the basis for atonement as it pertains to God.<sup>18</sup> According to Campbell, there is "a ray of light on the nature of atonement for sin afforded to us by an incident in the history of the children of Israel," the staying of the plague by Phinehas in Numbers 25:10–13. This incident, according to the Scottish preacher,

has the special importance of not being a mere instituted type, but a reality in itself. Phinehas had no command to authorize what he did, or promise to proceed upon. That which he did was a spontaneous expression of feeling. But that feeling was so in accordance with the mind of God, that God acknowledged it by receiving what he did as an atonement (Campbell, 108).

The story in Numbers 25 takes place at Shittim, where the people of Israel began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. The Israelites took part in Moabite sacrifices and bowed down to foreign gods; sexual immorality was included in such behavior, and the wrath of God burned against them in the form of a plague and as a result many perished. However, Phinehas, acting out of tremendous zeal for the Lord, vindicated God's name by taking up a spear and killing two perpetrators within the camp of Israel. Here we see a man turning

away the wrath of God, says Campbell, and staying the plague, which was the manifestation of that wrath by an act, which manifested both zeal for God and condemnation for sin. (Campbell, 108).

However, the lead question must be, what was the atoning element in the story? According to Campbell, it was not the mere death of the offenders brought about by Phinehas that made expiation for sin possible (Campbell, 109). Had they died by the plague, suggests Campbell, there would have been no atoning element of in their death. In fact, according to Numbers 25:9, twenty-four thousand people died in the plague, yet there was no hint of atonement in any of their deaths. Therefore, for Campbell, the atoning element could only be found in the mind of Phinehas, his zeal for God, his sympathy in God's judgment upon sin: this mindset was the essence of atonement (Campbell, 109). Moreover, Campbell sees the promise of God made to Phinehas afterward as a clear and certain allusion to the covenant of peace made with us in Christ, the everlasting priest of the new covenant. This story, claims Campbell, helps us attain to the true, atoning element in the suffering of Christ.

Thus, according to Campbell, if the zeal of Phinehas and his sympathy with God's judgment upon sin is allowed to stand as a paradigm for Christ's own work, we shall have no difficulty in seeing the place of Christ's suffering in the atonement. Consequently, for Campbell, it is not physical death per se that is the atoning element in the redemptive work of Christ, as the Apostle Peter suggests in I Peter 2:24; rather, it is the oneness of mind between the Father and the Son. Thus, the Son is zealous for the Father and the vindication of His name, and the Son agrees with the Father's judgment concerning sin (Campbell, 118). There exists an agreement between the two Persons of the Godhead.

Thus, argues Campbell, there was no disruption, as modified Calvinists suggest, between Father and Son. There was no "withholding the pleasant ideas and manifestations of the Father's love" from the Son when He died on the cross, as Edwards suggests.<sup>19</sup> Nor was there any time in which the Son felt forsaken by the Father. Almost all commentators and theologians point to the statement that Jesus uttered on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" as proof of the Son's dereliction as a result of the Father's paternal desertion. So, how could Campbell deny that such a disruption occurred?

Consulting Psalm 22, where these words find their origin, Campbell takes the penal interpretation of the modified Calvinist to task. He reminds us of our

18. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 276. Warfield classes Campbell's theory among those that conceive of the work of Christ as terminating primarily on God and secondarily on man.

19. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:606.

Christological commitment to Scripture, but to this text in particular, noting that the Psalm opens and closes with an eye to the cross (Campbell, 201). Thus, Campbell reasons by consequence, that the entire psalm is Christological. As has already been suggested, most would agree with such an interpretation; however, Campbell's explanation of what happens between the beginning and ending verse is innovative.

The Psalmist in Psalm 22 offers an unceasing plea to God with unwavering trust, yet the Psalmist is met with silence. However, the silence of God expressed early in the Psalm is not indicative of God's rejection of the sinner or of Christ, adds Campbell; rather, it is the worshiper's opportunity to see his own inability, his own weakness, and thereby agree with God's judgment upon it. However, when God finally does respond to the sufferer's unbroken trust, he is met with the unbroken love of God. Campbell points to verse 24, which says, "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; *neither hath He hid His face from Him*; but when He cried unto Him, He heard" (Campbell, 201).

Consequently, we must not understand the silence of God in the Psalm as rejection, but as an opportunity for the psalmist to agree with God as to his condition and God's judgment upon it. Furthermore, contends Campbell, the Psalm confirms that God had always heard the supplicant and had never hid His benevolent face from him. Thus, Campbell affirms, we must understand Jesus' cry of dereliction in light of the entire Psalm, which means that it will no longer be possible to see the utterance of the Son as being a sensible admission of the Father's wrath under the imputation of sin. Rather, the Psalm speaks of an agreement between Father and Son as well as a relationship that remains undisturbed.

Having established the oneness of mind between the Father and the Son, reminiscent of the story of Phinehas, Campbell takes up the work of Christ and in so doing asks a crucial question, how did Christ deal with God on man's behalf?

#### THE MEDIATOR'S PERFECT PENANCE

According to modified Calvinists, Christ dealt with God on man's behalf by enduring the wrath and curse of God, which Campbell argued meant a filial disruption. Nevertheless, according to the Scottish preacher, such was not the case nor could it be. However, oddly enough, he found the seeds for his retrospective view of the atonement in none other than Jonathan Edwards, whom Campbell considered a modified Calvinist. Campbell points out an obscure, perhaps unguarded, statement made by

Edwards in his, *On Satisfaction for Sin*, which indicates that sin and its effects could have been dealt with by way of perfect repentance. The actual quote reads,

None will deny that some crimes are so horrid, and so deserving of punishment, that it is requisite that they should not go unpunished, unless something very considerable be done to make up for the crime; *either some answerable repentance*, or some other compensation, that in some measure at least balances the desert of punishment, and so, as it were, takes it off, or disannuls it....<sup>20</sup>

Edwards conceives of this "answerable repentance" originating in the mind of sinful humanity. However he says, due to man's inability to offer such unblemished obedience as a result of original pollution, mankind is left to face the punishment payable to him. Again Edwards writes,

Now there can be no repentance of it, or sorrow for it, in any measure answerable or proportionable to the heinousness of the demerit of the crime; because that is infinite, and there can be no infinite sorrow for sin in finite creatures; yea, there can be none but what is infinitely short of it, none that bears any proportion to it. Repentance is as nothing in comparison of it, and therefore can weigh nothing when put in the scales with it, and so does nothing at all towards compensating it, or diminishing the desert of requisiteness of punishment, any more than if there were no repentance.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, for Edwards, perfect repentance is humanly impossible. As a matter of fact, the best repentance humanity has to offer amounts to no repentance.

However, Campbell claims to see something that Edwards seemingly missed, probably, according to Campbell, due to Edwards' inordinate emphasis on God's justice over against any other attribute, but specifically love (Campbell, 119). Nevertheless, as Campbell understood Edwards, the Scotsman explained that the Mediator had two alternatives open to him, either endure for sinners an equivalent punishment or present adequate sorrow and repentance toward God.<sup>22</sup> Campbell agreed with Edwards; to expect perfect penance from humanity

20. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:583 (emphasis mine).

21. *The Works of President Edwards*, 1:583.

22. Campbell, 119. It should be noted that many theologians disagree over what Campbell expressed as "endure for sinners an equivalent punishment." Edwards believed that "Christ suffered that which the damned in hell do not suffer" (2:574). According to Pye Smith, "It

was to wish for the impossible. However, according to Campbell, Edwards neglected to think outside of the box and ask a crucial question, was such a thing impossible for Christ, the One Mediator who could offer perfect penance?

According to Campbell, perfect penance is the cornerstone for understanding what he called the retrospective aspect of the atonement, and it is here that we must deal with penal suffering (Campbell, 125). For him, if such a thing as penal infliction existed, this was its proper place under Christological rubric. Yet, Campbell could not conceive of the Son of God enduring a penal infliction in the very act of honoring His Father (Campbell, 117). For how could such a thing vindicate the name of God and the character of the Lawgiver, Campbell asked? Nor could the Scottish preacher envision the disruptive effects that penal suffering inflicted by the Father would cause to the unbreakable filial relationship between Father and Son.

Therefore, Campbell viewed Christ as having only a single option before Him: He must offer “adequate sorrow and repentance toward God.” So, according to Campbell, Christ was the perfect penitent, “bearing us and our sins on His heart before the Father,” as well as responding to the Father’s judgment on our sins “with that confession of their evil and of the righteousness of the wrath of God against them, and holy sorrow because of them” all rendered on our behalf because we were

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is, I humbly conceive, worse than improper to represent the sufferings of Jesus Christ, in their last and most terrible extremity, as the same with those of condemned sinners in the state of punishment” (*Priesthood*, 45). Thomas Jenkyn in his *The Extent of the Atonement in its Relation to God and the Universe* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859), 251, wrote, “The sufferings of Christ were, both in nature and kind, different from the sufferings due to sinners.” Symington writes, “It is not necessary to suppose that the sufferings which Christ endured on our behalf were precisely the same in kind and degree which are experienced by the wicked in the place of final woe” (*The Atonement*, 158). Hodge also writes, “While therefore, the value of Christ’s sufferings is due mainly to the dignity of his person, their character and intensity are essential elements in their worth. Nevertheless, their character as penal depends not on their nature, but on their design” (*Systematics*, 475). What is more, Campbell betrays a misunderstanding of those he calls modified Calvinists when he suggests that the suffering he is suggesting Christ underwent “is a very different thing from weighing the sufferings of Christ in scales against the sufferings of the damned” (Campbell, 120).

23. Warfield, *Studies*, 276. Interestingly, Geerhardus Vos suggests that during His baptism Christ repented for His people vicariously. Vos does not develop the implications of such an assertion but rather claims that such a notion was enigmatically present in His baptism done by the Baptist. Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 320.

24. Campbell, 120 (emphasis mine).

25. This appears to be similar, though not identical, to that of

incapable of rendering such a confession (Campbell, 120). This theory, as Warfield has said, is a “remarkably attractive way” of setting forth an atonement that terminates primarily on God and secondarily on man.<sup>23</sup> However, this aspect of the theory has several inescapable difficulties.

The oneness of mind between the Father and Son and the confession of the Son appear to be a tautology; after all, confession is simply an agreement between various parties. In making confession then, the Son is simply agreeing with the Father, but this time on our behalf. However, without the assumption of an imputation of our guilt, it is difficult to see how this confession could possibly be made on our behalf. And yet that is exactly what Campbell maintains, a confession without the assumption of imputation, for,

All men have revolted from the idea of the Son of God being actually in His Father’s eyes as a criminal through imputation of man’s sin, and being punished accordingly, is thought to be avoided; as well as all that is of the nature of legal fiction in imputation of guilt to an innocent being, or of righteousness to a guilty being (Campbell, 82).

And yet, after having dismissed the transactional and vicarious element of Christ’s confession, Campbell nonetheless affirms the following:

Yet, that it (confession) was for sin is also implied in that very nature, and for the sin of others than the sufferer, for He was without sin; therefore was it vicarious, expiatory, an atonement – an atonement for sin as distinguished from the punishment of sin (Campbell, 121)?

However, Campbell appears to realize what he is suggesting and in a perhaps unguarded statement, he admits,

No thought unworthy of the faith that the sufferer is God in our nature, comes through exalting our conceptions of the measure of the suffering endured on account of sins, *when such exalting is thus but the raising of our apprehensions of what our sins is to the heart of God.*<sup>24</sup>

Clearly, if imputation is discarded, then Christ’s confession of our sin, or his agreeing with the Father’s judgment upon our sin, is nothing more than Christ’s attempt to sensibly feel for us rather than be punished for us.<sup>25</sup> But rather than being problematic, this understanding comes as a relief to Campbell, who writes,

I freely confess that to my own mind it is a relief, not only intellectually, but also morally and spiritually, to see that there is no foundation for the conception that when Christ suffered for us, the just for the unjust, He suffered either “as by imputation unjust,” or “as if He were unjust” (Campbell, 222).

But perhaps Campbell ought to have considered the awakened sinner, the very person with whom he was concerned at the outset. For how can it help the sinner to know that Father and Son agree with one another concerning man’s sinfulness and the judgment due him? Rather it would appear to be one more reason to despair. Furthermore, how can it help the awakened sinner to know that the Son confessed such agreement with the Father but there was nothing transactional about it; therefore, the sinner is simply left as a guilty onlooker. Whereas the modified Calvinist, as Campbell referred to them, could point to the death of Christ and the imputation of guilt as accomplishing atonement on behalf of the sinner, Campbell can do no such thing. Rather, he can only talk about a sensible and reciprocal feeling shared by the Father and Son. Of course, Campbell would like us to believe that the awakened sinner will also agree with God’s judgment concerning his sin, but again, a shared sensible feeling is nothing more than a fiction itself, which leads to the last of Campbell’s three considerations, the death of Christ.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST’S DEATH

The fact that Christ died raises a serious question in regard to Campbell’s theory of atonement, that being, if Christ made full confession of sin on behalf of all humanity before God, why did He need to die? After all, if the wages of sin is death; it might equally be expected that the wages of perfect repentance is life, if for no one else but Christ Himself. Also, Scripture tells us that the prayer of a righteous man avails much, it is truly effective. Christ was perfect, the only truly righteous man; therefore, what are we to make of His death after having made a righteous and perfect confession of sin and that not for himself, but for all humanity?

Sensing the need to answer such questions, Campbell’s first response was to say that Christ needed to die because He was truly human. Thus, Campbell reduced the death of Christ to the simple motions of life, “for as a man liveth, so he dieth.” Yet, sensing that more explanation was needed Campbell went on to say, “Further, as our Lord alone truly tasted death, so to Him alone had death its perfect meaning as the wages of sin, for in

Him alone was their full entrance into the mind of God towards sin...” (Campbell, 216). Yet, Campbell seems to be admitting what he had taken pain to deny, God demands satisfaction for sin.

It seems as though Campbell has lost a crucial distinction in Reformed theology, that between the active and passive obedience of Christ. For even if it be granted that Christ made perfect confession for sins, we must understand such an act as active obedience, as an act fulfilling all righteousness, which can never supplant the inevitable passive obedience to which Christ must willingly submit in order to be a propitiation for sins. However, this important distinction seems to be lost on or dismissed by Campbell.

Yet, as we have noted, it was impossible for Campbell to avoid the fact that Christ’s death was in some sense or other a result of sin’s wages. Whether it is their full entrance into the mind of God or as a satisfaction for sin in Christ’s death upon the tree it is inescapable that Christ’s death was inextricably tied to sin and God’s judgment upon sinners.

Certainly such a notion could not have appeased the fear of the awakened sinner. Not only does he apprehend that there is nothing transactional in the confession of Christ, seemingly made on his behalf, but he is also fully aware of the fact that Christ died in spite of His righteous confession. This, it seems, would only serve to paralyze the sinner with fear. For not only do Father and Son agree as to the nature and punishment of sin, but it appears that sin is so heinous that a perfect confession is not enough to allay the wrath of God toward it and ultimately them. How could such an understanding create anything but despair in the heart of the awakened sinner?

#### Conclusion

So, what should we make of Campbell’s theory? Commenting on the Scottish preacher’s work, Warfield writes, “Nevertheless, the theory rises immeasurably above the mass of those already enumerated, in looking upon Christ as really a Savior, who performs a really saving work, terminating immediately upon God” (Warfield, *Studies*, 277). To ground the redemptive work in God was certainly Campbell’s goal.

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Friedrich Schleiermacher’s view of Christ’s suffering. For him, the climax of Christ’s suffering “was sympathy with misery.” Unlike Campbell, Schleiermacher has no transactional element in his theory, yet they are similar as to the nature of Christ’s suffering. Cf. Keith W. Clements, ed., *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 232.

However, much is left wanting and many questions are left unanswered. For example, has Campbell confused what he calls the faith of the atonement with saving faith? Does the filial standing of Christ before the Father negate any form of legal status before God on man's behalf? What is more, we must be deeply concerned by Campbell's reductionist attitude toward the physical death of Christ. We must also be concerned with Campbell's definition of the ground of faith, that being, that God is the Father of our spirits, rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But most significantly, has Campbell allayed the fears of the awakened sinner, which he has sought so strenuously to do? It appears that he has not. Rather it seems that he has established a theory of the atonement that speaks more philosophically than biblically of the person of Christ. Campbell has done what he accused

modified Calvinists of doing. He has overemphasized one attribute of God to the neglect of the others. He has dismissed imputation, the transactional element of the atonement, and supplanted it with feeling. He has reduced the death of Christ to a non-atoning element while raising perfect penance to a level of prominence that is questionable at best.

So, what do we make of Campbell's theory? We must acknowledge the significance of the work and recognize how widely it has penetrated and anticipated modern Christology. However, Campbell has failed to explain the whole of the matter, especially those things that he so vehemently criticized in what he called modified Calvinism. What is more, he did what any minister should shrink to do: he left the sinner feeling more hopeless than when he found him. ■

### *In Brief: Christ our Substitute, J. Gresham Machen*

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." That is only a more forcible way of saying that Christ bore a curse for us, or that He became accursed for us. Perhaps the reason why Paul avoids saying that Christ became "accursed" for us is that the word "accursed" in Greek, like the English word, might mean "worthy of a curse" and in that sense the word would not apply. Christ was not worthy of the curse that He bore upon the cross. We alone were worthy of it; He endured it for us though He was worthy of naught but glory and honor and praise.

But *what* curse was it that Christ bore upon the cross? There ought really to be no doubt about the answer. It was *our* curse, the curse of God's law that rightly rested upon us because of sin.

It is perfectly true, indeed, that the Greek preposition here translated "for" does not necessarily indicate substitution; it does not necessarily mean "instead of."

The preposition that does mean "instead of" is used, for example, in Mk. 10:45, where it is said that "the Son of Man cam. . . to give His life a ransom instead of many." There we find the great doctrine of the substitutionary atonement taught in the plainest possible way by our Lord Himself and in that one of the Gospels which is thought by modern skeptical criticism to be the earliest of four.

But although that preposition, which means most clearly "instead of," is not used in our passage, yet our passage teaches the substitutionary atonement in the clearest possible way. Some scholars think that the proposition which *is* used here shades over in certain passages into the meaning "instead of."

There is something to be said for such a view. But the question is here quite unimportant; for even if the preposition means in our passage, as it usually does, "in behalf of," "for the benefit of," and not "instead of," yet the idea of substitution is presented by the entire context in the clearest possible manner. "We were under the curse of the law," says Paul; and "Christ redeemed us by becoming a curse in our behalf." Christ bore a curse when He hung there on the cross. But what curse was it? Paul makes the answer perfectly plain. It was not merely the curse of some human law; but it was the curse of *God's* law. True, Christ died at the hands of wicked men; putting Him to death was a terrible crime. But He died, according to Paul as well as according to Peter, "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God," and the curse which Paul quotes in the very next verse as resting upon Christ is the curse of the law of God.

Here we come to the very heart of Paul's teaching. The curse which Christ bore upon the cross was not a curse that *wrongly* rested upon Him; it was not a curse pronounced upon Him by some wicked human law. No, it was the curse of God's law; it was a curse, therefore,—we tremble as e say it, but the Scripture compels us to say it—it was a curse which *rightly* rested upon Him. But if that be so, there can be no doubt but that the substitutionary atonement is taught in Scripture. The only way in which a curse could *rightly* rest upon a sinless One is that He was the substitute, in bearing that curse, for those upon whom it did rightly rest. That is the heart of Paul's teaching and the heart of the whole Bible.

J. Gresham Machen, *Notes on Galatians* (1972; repr. SGCB, 2006), 180–181. ■