

PENALTY DELAYED OR DEATH ABOLISHED?

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How many times have you heard, “You’re going to pay for that”? You may have even heard, “You’re going to pay for that in hell.” And yet we sin, “Jesus Paid It All, all to Him I owe.” Which is it? Do we pay for our sin in hell or has He paid for it on Calvary?

It is a pagan notion that God demands a human blood sacrifice for sin either now or later in hell to pay for sin. This idea is been absorbed into Romanism and further into Protestantism.

“Back in the day” when school boys were punished for “acting-up” in class by a whipping, my father informed us that if we were punished at school we could expect the same when we got home. One day the principal took me out to the woodshed and pulled off his belt and let me have it. I decided not to tell my folks about it. But evidently the principal called my father, and sure enough, when I got home, I received a second punishment for the same “crime”. I never felt free from punishment for my bad deed until I paid the price at home. I was in “double jeopardy” both at school and at home!

There are some who have expressed a radically different idea of what happened on the cross than what we see in the good news. They maintain that the sacrifice of Christ “merely deferred” for humanity the second death that is the wages of sin. In their words: “Under Heaven’s plan to redeem man the punishment or wages of sin—eternal

death—was not waived but was deferred. . . . [It] was not annulled, but was merely deferred. . . . delayed.”¹ Great consequences follow from this view of the atonement.

In this view, God has put us in double jeopardy. If this is true, every human soul is born into the world with that sentence of eternal death still hanging over his head. The fatal sentence has been “merely deferred,” temporarily “delayed.” Logic demands that a debt that has been “merely deferred” can not have been paid.

According to this view, Christ has *offered* to pay their debt of sin on the cross. But if the sinner does not take the initiative in his salvation, the “deferred” punishment will fall on him as if Christ had not died for him, because his debt was never truly paid. In other words, Christ did not really “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15). The consequence of this view is that the sinner’s faith and obedience is what initiates the process of atonement.

By their “not waived but deferred, . . . delayed” doctrine, they logically take a further step—they want a *conditional sacrifice*. If by His death Christ did not pay the full penalty for the sins of “all men,” the logical conclusion has to be that He died only provisionally, conditionally, tentatively, and the sinner’s punishment was only “deferred,” the divine sacrifice itself being conditional on man’s faith and obedience first.

¹ *Foundation*, April 1994, pp. 9, 12.

We've all heard stories about criminals who have paid their debt to society by serving out their sentences in prison and then getting out on parole. They were still under the supervision of a parole officer. If the parolee failed to make his appointment with the officer, he could be thrown back into jail. Thus the parolee was under "double jeopardy."

Is this the way it is with God's forgiveness? He offers us a pardon, but we must believe and be obedient. Failing the terms of our probation does God make us pay for our sins by destruction in hell fire?

Many people have that idea about the sacrifice of Christ. All He did was to put us on probation, they say, and our punishment for sin has only been deferred. Now it is true that we are on probation during this life, but not because our punishment has only been deferred.

When God forgives a sin does He forget it? Or does He dredge it up out of the depths of the sea where He promised He would dump it? "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah. 7:19). God has also said several times, "I am He that bloteth out thy transgressions . . . and will not remember thy sins," and "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Isa 43:25; Heb 8:12).

How much forgiveness was given to you (and me) when Jesus died on His cross? In a story that Jesus told, He explained it so clearly that a child can grasp it.

"A certain king" found that his servant owed "ten thousand talents" (millions/billions of dollars?),

obviously an expression intended to mean an impossibly enormous sum. The "servant . . . had not to pay"—he didn't have a dime. So the "lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt." Imagine an electronic transfer of funds; the king's account debited, the servant's, credited. Now think of "all men" being likewise credited—you have a penniless "king." So was Christ "penniless" on His cross—"forsaken" of the Father, bearing the debt of "every man's" sin in His soul, "made to be sin for us," "all men." An infinite transfer of credit! (Matt. 18:23-35).

The "servant" promises in old covenant terms "I will pay thee all," and his "lord . . . moved with compassion" treats him with new covenant "much more abounding grace." But the servant then demands "a hundred pence" from his neighbor, thus demonstrating he does not receive the forgiveness, although it was truly given him. The king's account was drained by the debit of what He gave His servants; He had given away all His righteousness, "emptied Himself."

The servant cannot reverse the transaction, for it was "done" (the cry on the cross was, "It is done!"). Then his lord sent him to prison until he paid the original debt (Mt. 18:23-35). He takes the debt back on himself voluntarily, and totally, unnecessarily, must from now on deal with "the tormentors" until he shall "pay all that is due" (which of course, will be never, ever). So in the final judgment, when the lost die the second death, they can never "pay" the debt of sin they owe; they can't. Christ already paid it, even though they have never repented. "By

grace” they had been saved, but like Esau with his birthright, they had thrown away what “the king” had given them.

The real issue is: what is the meaning of the cross of Christ? What did Christ accomplish on His cross for every sinner? Christ did pay the full penalty for all our sins. No question about it.

The good news is that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross accomplished infinitely more than “merely deferring” the original punishment for sin. “The punishment or wages of sin—eternal death” was neither “waived,” “deferred,” nor “delayed,” but was inflicted totally on Christ. This is the only foundation on which grace can rest. Grace that does not rest on Christ’s complete sacrifice must be “cheap grace.” He actually and truly paid the debt of every man’s sin, and therefore fully died the second death of “every man.” Thus there is no reason for any human soul to die that second death except for his own personal unbelief, his refusal to appreciate what Christ has actually (not provisionally) accomplished for him on the cross (John 3:17-19). This view of the cross may take one’s breath away.

The truth of the cross clearly defines the gospel:

(1) “We see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). This “death” could not be the first death which the Bible calls a “sleep.” It had to be the second, the total “undeferred,” “undelayed” punishment for our sin.

(2) “Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath *abolished* death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). Again, this

“death” cannot be the first which has obviously not been “abolished.” The lake of fire was never intended for human beings, only for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). Another truth follows:

(3) “God . . . gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish” (John 3:16). Thus, His “sacrifice” was not only His incarnation in assuming human nature forever, but a giving-for that involved dying the second-death punishment for every man’s sin. This is the foundation that makes grace possible, the death which the broken law requires.

(4) “Christ *died for our sins*, according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). This was the equivalent of the second death, then He made the commitment of all He had, to give Himself to death and hell forever, withholding nothing.² This is the measure of His *agape*.

(5) Adam and Eve would have died that second death in Eden if Christ had not given Himself as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Gen. 2:17; Rev. 13:8).³ He did it before they could do anything good to deserve it. Adam in the Garden was the entire human race, for we were all “in him.” Thus “in Adam” the entire human race corporately

² DA 752, 753; 2T 200-215.

³ They would have suffered “instant death” but for the sacrifice of Christ (PP 74). Thus that “sacrifice” legally or judicially justified Adam and Eve. It covered them and permitted them to live without dying the second death. And whatever it did for them, it had also to do for the entire human race which was “in” them. The entire human race is “Adam.”

shares his condemnation, but “even so” “in Christ” they share that “verdict of acquittal” which the Lamb achieved as He was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rom. 5:16, 18, NEB; Rev. 13:8).

(6) Christ “was wounded for our transgressions. . . . The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa. 53:4-12). He was not “stricken” only for that of the righteous, but for that “of us all.”

(7) Therefore, the glorious conclusion follows: if the “iniquity of us all” was laid on Christ; if He “died for our sins;” if He “abolished death” by His sacrifice; if He “was wounded for our transgressions” and was “bruised for our iniquities,” *it follows that He paid the “unwaived,” “undeferred,” “undelayed” penalty of every man’s sin.* This is the ABC of the plan of salvation. Ellen White seems clear:

“In consequence of limited ideas of the sufferings of Christ, many place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement. . . . The death of Christ proclaimed the justice of His Father’s law in punishing the transgressor, in that he consented to suffer the penalty of the law himself. . . . [What] ended the life of Christ upon the cross . . . was the crushing weight of the sins of the world. . . . The sin of the world, with all its terribleness, was felt to the utmost by the Son of God. . . . The Redeemer drains the mysterious cup even to its dregs. The separation that sin makes between God and man [the horror of the second death] was fully realized

and keenly felt by the innocent, suffering Man of Calvary.”⁴

(8) Christ died the equivalent of the second death. In other words, He corporately identified Himself with “every man” in that “anguish of the lost,” the indescribable alienation from life or joy or light which Christ “tasted” for “every man.” “The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart.”⁵ Thus He was “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).⁶

This verb “made” is not conditional. This is shocking to many Seventh-day Adventists, but it is true that Christ has actually accomplished something for every human being. He has identified Himself intimately with the deepest recess of every person’s secret soul—the ever-present yet buried fear of eternal death. He has lifted that condemnation, making present life and its happiness possible.⁷ Thus He “lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

(9) Christ’s sacrifice explains why there is no need for any human soul to die that second death—except for his unbelief. What will make the anguish of the lost so totally complete will be the full realization at last that He did die for their sin, He did

⁴ 2T 200-215.

⁵ DA 752, 753.

⁶ This is a unique Adventist truth because most Evangelical churches believe in the natural immortality of the soul, a doctrine which blinds them to the true nature of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

⁷ Cf. Heb. 2:14, 15. The Bible does not teach Universalism. The sinner can despise and reject Christ if he chooses.

pay their debt! They will see their own second death as totally unnecessary except for their hard-hearted unbelief: “In the day of final judgment, every lost soul will understand the nature of his own rejection of truth. The cross will be presented, and its real bearing will be seen by every mind that has been blinded by transgression. Before the vision of Calvary with its mysterious Victim, sinners will stand condemned.”⁸

The cross defines unbelief as far more than a passive neutrality, a sitting on the fence, or a human oversight which we define as “neglect.” The lost will see that their unbelief was active *disbelief*, a deliberate choice to cast contempt upon the sacrificial love of the Son of God.⁹ It seems that it is easy to misunderstand the profound nature of unbelief. Many of us seem to see it as merely passive do-nothingness.¹⁰

Christ’s atonement is infinitely more than we have been ready to understand. Every human being is involved: “Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, stands between Satan and *every soul*. . . . The sins of *everyone* who has lived upon the earth were laid upon Christ, testifying to the fact that no one need be a loser in the conflict with Satan.”¹¹ What Good News! And how the world hungers to hear it!

⁸ DA 58; GC 668. Unbelief is far more than passive neutrality, even as true faith is far more than passive acquiescence.

⁹ This is further explicated in GC 543, 668.

¹⁰ Cf. *Remember*, p. 156.

¹¹ RH, May 23, 1899.

This is not to deny that the lost will indeed die the second death. In despising, rejecting, *dis*-believing what Christ did, they “counted the blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing, and . . . [did] despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29). This is the true dimension of their unbelief or disbelief.¹² They will suffer the “wages of sin” because by repeated choice they have taken back upon themselves the sin Christ died for, and retrieved the condemnation and punishment which He has already borne for them. God does not put them in “double jeopardy.” If people could only see this truth *now*, what a difference it would make with many! The message of the cross is “the third angel’s message in verity.” The “loud cry” message, “Be ye reconciled to God,” will make this clear to the hungering world that is darkened by a false concept of God’s character.

What is the fundamental error which produces confusion? Some insist that unconditional love is not unconditional pardon, which is very true. But by their “not waived but deferred, . . . delayed” doctrine, they logically take a further step—they want a *conditional sacrifice*. If by His death Christ did not pay the full penalty for the sins of “all men,” the logical conclusion has to be that He died only provisionally, conditionally, tentatively, and the sinner’s punishment was only “deferred,” the divine sacrifice itself being conditional on man’s faith and obedience first—that the sacrifice of Christ is only provisional, is in vain, it does no one any good

¹² For Waggoner’s understanding of this truth, see *The Glad Tidings*, pp. 11, 14, 61, 66, 67; *Waggoner on Romans*, pp. 101, 144, 166, 172. For Jones’s, see RH, April 17, 1894.

unless he takes the initiative to believe and obey. But we see the divine sacrifice as unconditional, not provisional, and “finished.” Grace is given to all, totally unmerited. Christ truly, actually, died for “all men.”¹³

This fundamental “merely deferred” doctrine naturally colors their understanding of justification by faith. The confusion stems from a subtle idea lurking in the shadows—the popular “limited atonement.” In other words, God’s foresight saw the eventual damnation of the lost and thus He held in abeyance, “deferred, . . . delayed” the punishment for their sin, to inflict it on *them* later.

In contrast, the gospel insists that the punishment which Christ bore was total for “every man.” And “every man” has already enjoyed relief from the life-crushing condemnation of the second death. How could those “saints or sinners eat their daily food” and even live, if a conscious “haunting fear of death [held] them in bondage throughout the whole course of their lives”? (Heb. 2:15, Amplified). Christ has lifted it! He has done something for “all men,” and it is far more than “a second probation” or conditional “grace.” Paul says grace has given, not merely offered, a “gift”—justification (Rom. 5:15).

The “merely deferred” doctrine would logically rewrite John 3:16 to make it read: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son

¹³ See *Sabbath School Quarterly*, July 23, September 3, 1988; cf. October 2, 4, 5, 1995. In contrast, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660 declares that the cross has given “saint or sinner” all the temporal good and all the happiness he has ever known, whether or not he believes.

for those who believe.” And of course, that would be very true; but it is only a small part of the awe-inspiring truth. *He also gave Him fully as much for those who do not believe.* This divinely extravagant gift of justifying love was illustrated in Mary Magdalene’s “wasteful” offering of her precious perfume on Jesus’ feet—which Judas and the disciples did not appreciate.

I heard this story about a little girl whose family were planning to move—lots of families are on the move. On an average, families don’t stay in one place very long. Well, this little girl kept hearing Mommy and Daddy and all her older brothers and sisters saying, “We’re going to move! We’re packing up everything, all the furniture, all the toys, all the dishes, and we’re moving to another city far away.”

The little girl listened to all this and kept wondering every day. Finally one day she asked, “When you all move away, what’s going to happen to me all alone?” No one had thought to tell her that when the family moved away, they would take her along too! She was afraid of being left alone.

Everyone is afraid to be left alone. Children hear about people getting sick and dying, or getting killed in accidents, or murdered, and they worry, “What will happen to me if my parents die?” Even grownups worry about being left alone.

Why is it not a sin to feel that you are forsaken by God, but if you say that you are, it becomes a sin? The answer is the difference between temptation and sin. A thousand temptations do not equal one sin; the sin comes in yielding to the temptation, choosing to disbelieve.

When you are tempted to feel forsaken by God, you are being tested and tried (probably everyone has been so tempted at some time). But when you say “I am forsaken by God!” you have sinned because you have denied and contradicted the word of God: “He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Jesus conquered temptation by quoting Scripture to Satan, “It is written.” You do the same! When you are tempted to feel forsaken by God, quote that precious text, over and over again. And because you have overcome that temptation, you will be able to encourage others who are so tempted. You will actually win souls; for there are many people who need the testimony of someone who has been tempted as they are tempted, but who has won the victory by faith.

You may ask, “But maybe I have committed the unpardonable sin! If so, has God forsaken me?” The unpardonable sin is not God forsaking the sinner, but the sinner forsaking God. He still loves the person who has committed that sin (if he has!), but the sinner has burnt out his antenna and cannot receive the forgiveness “signal” from God. If you can catch even the faintest signal from the Holy Spirit assuring you of God’s faithful love, cherish it; don’t let Satan overwhelm you with discouragement because you know you have sinned. It’s sinners that Christ has come to save. We rob Him of His due if we withhold ourselves from Him. Don’t accept Satan’s judgment; appeal over his head to the Supreme Court of Heaven—Christ Himself.

I have visited patients in rehab hospitals and nursing homes who take exercises, learning all over again how to walk. They have been in an accident, or had a stroke. They exercise those flabby muscles, and they overcome. So can you “exercise” your faith; choose to believe that promise, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!”