

THE WORK OF CHRIST
Part IV: The Reformation Church (cont.)

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I. INTRODUCTION.

The gospel of Christ, in terms of its ultimate meaning and significance, pivots on the mighty axis of the nature of sin and the nature of Christ's death. These two doctrines, like the facts which they represent, are mutually inseparable. If sin is merely a disease, non-constitutional, then the atonement should aim toward a non-constitutional purpose (i.e., moral influence, example theory); if, however, sin is constitutional (i.e., guilt), then the atonement must be a penal satisfaction. These concepts are crucial to understanding the gospel. The period from Anselm through the Reformation is the era of the development of the nature of Christ's death. As the previous lesson plan traced the atonement from Anselm to Luther, this lesson shall attempt to trace the same topic from Calvin to the rise of the Arminians.

II. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE REFORMATION (SIXTEENTH CENTURY).

- A. Martin Luther and the Atonement.**
- B. Calvin, Calvinism, and the Atonement.**
 - 1. John Calvin and the Atonement**

Calvin's concept of the atonement is clearly Anselmic with the advantage of clarification and refinement. Both stress the purpose of the incarnation and the unique importance of the God-man as effecting a penal substitution. A classic passage of Calvin is found in (*Institutes*. II, 16.6):

“The very form of the death embodies a striking truth. The cross was cursed not only in the opinion of men, but by the enactment of the Divine Law. Hence Christ, while suspended on it, subjects himself to the curse. And thus it behoved to be done, in order that the whole curse, which on account of our iniquities awaited us, or rather lay upon us, might be taken from us by being transferred to him. This was also shadowed in the Law, since *trmça*, the word by which sin itself is properly designated, was applied to the sacrifices and expiation offered for sin. By this application of the term, the Spirit intended to intimate, that they were a kind of *kaqarmavtwn* (purifications), bearing, by substitution, the curse due to sin. But that which was represented figuratively in the Mosaic sacrifices is exhibited in Christ the archetype. wherefore, in order to accomplish a full expiation, he made his soul *μçà*, i.e., a propitiatory victim for sin (as the prophet says, Isaiah 53:5, 10), on which the guilt and penalty being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. The Apostle declares this more plainly when he says, that “he made him to be sin who knew no sin; that we might be made righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21). For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity. To the same thing he seems to refer, when he says, that he “condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3), the Father having destroyed the power of sin when it was transferred to the flesh of Christ. This term, therefore, indicates that Christ, in his death, was offered to the Father as a propitiatory victim; that, expiation being made by his sacrifice, we might cease to tremble at the divine wrath. It is now clear what the prophet means when he says that the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6); namely, that as he was to wash away the pollution of sins, they were transferred to him by imputation. Of this the cross to which he was nailed was a symbol, as the Apostle declared, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (Galatians 3:13, 14). In the same way Peter said, that he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24), inasmuch as from the very symbol of the curse, we perceive more clearly that the burden with which we were oppressed was laid upon him. Nor are we to understand that by the curse which he

endured he was himself overwhelmed, but rather that by enduring it he repressed, broke, annihilated all its force. Accordingly, faith apprehends acquittal in the condemnation of Christ, and blessing in his curse. Hence it is not without cause that Paul magnificently celebrates the triumph which Christ obtained upon the cross, as if the cross, the symbol of ignominy, had been converted into a triumphal chariot. For he said, that he blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross: that, “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:14, 15). Nor is this to be wondered at; for, as another Apostle declared, Christ, “through the external Spirit, offered himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14), and hence that transformation of the cross which were otherwise against its nature. But that these things may take deep root and have their seat in our inmost hearts, we must never lose sight of sacrifice and ablution. For, were not Christ a victim, we could have no sure conviction of his being *ajpovlutrwsii*, *ajntivlutron*, *kai iJlasthrion*, our substitute-ransom and propitiation. And hence mention is always made of blood whenever Scripture explains the mode of redemption: although the shedding of Christ’s blood was available not only for propitiation, but also acted as a laver to purge our defilements”.

Differences do emerge between Anselm and the Reformers (particularly Calvin). First, three general differences, then one particular difference.

- a) All the Reformers stressed faith to a great degree within the idea of substitution. Shedd stated (*Systematic Theology*. II, 366), “The soteriology of the Reformation, while adopting with equal heartiness this objective view of the Anselmic theory, unites it in a greater degree than did this latter, the subjective element of faith.”
- b) Anselm stressed satisfaction of the honor of God, while the Reformers stressed satisfaction of the righteousness of God, a penal sacrifice.
- c) Anselm stressed satisfaction or the alternative wrath of God, while Calvin and Luther stressed satisfaction through punishment or the alternative wrath of God.
- d) Calvin differs from Anselm relative to the active and passive obedience of Christ. While Anselm saw the atonement based solely in Christ’s death, the passive aspect, Calvin saw Christ providing

the atonement through his life and death. Shedd explained (*History*. II, 343): “Hence not only that obedience to God his father which He exhibits in His passion and death but also that obedience which He exhibited in voluntarily subjecting Himself to the law and fulfilling it for our sakes is imputed to us for righteousness.” Calvin wrote (*Institutes*. II, 16.5):

“When is it asked then how Christ, by abolishing sin, removed the enmity between God and us, and purchased a righteousness which made him favourable and kind to us, it may be answered generally, that he accomplished this by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by the testimony of Paul, As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19). And indeed he elsewhere extends the ground of pardon which exempts from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ, When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (Galatians 4:4, 5). Thus even at his baptism he declared that a part of righteousness was fulfilled by his yielding obedience to the command of the Father. In short, from the moment when he assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance. Scripture, however, the more certainly to define the mode of salvation, ascribes it peculiarly and specially to the death of Christ”.

N.B. Calvin’s emphasis of active obedience appears difficult to grasp; the Scriptures place imparted righteousness as emanating from the cross. However, active obedience is crucial and without it there could be no cross. The life he lived qualified Him to die the death he died, but the life itself was not of itself propitiuous.

2. Calvinism and the Atonement. A few examples of Calvinist creeds will be given to sustain that the Reformed Tradition follows the precepts of its mentor.

a) The Scots Confession of 1560 has a lovely section on Christ’s death (*Creeds of Christendom*. 9, 169-70):

“That our Lord Jesus offered Himself a voluntary sacrifice unto His Father for us, that He suffered contradiction of sinners, that He was wounded and plagued for our transgressions, that He, the clean innocent Lamb of God,

was condemned in the presence of an earthly judge, that we should be absolved before the judgment seat of our God; that He suffered not only the cruel death of the cross, which was accursed by the sentence of God; but also that He suffered for a season the wrath of His Father which sinners had deserved. But yet we avow that He remained the only, well beloved, and blessed Son of His Father even in the midst of His anguish and torment which He suffered in body and soul to make full atonement for the sins of the people. From this we confess and avow that there remains no other sacrifice for sin; if any affirm so, we do not hesitate to say that they are blasphemers against Christ's death and the everlasting atonement thereby purchased for us".

b) The Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561 stated (*Creeeds. 21, 202-203*):

"We believe that Jesus Christ is ordained with an oath to be an everlasting High-Priest, after the order of Melchizedek: who hath presented himself in our behalf before his Father, to appease his wrath by his full satisfaction, by offering himself on the tree of the cross, and pouring out his precious blood to purge away our sins; and the prophets had foretold. For it is written, He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed; he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and numbered with the transgressors; and condemned by Pontius Pilate as a malefactor, though he had first declared him innocent. Therefore, he restored that which he took not away, and suffered the just for the unjust, as well in his body as in his soul, feeling the terrible punishment which our sins had merited; insomuch that his sweat became like unto drops of blood falling on the ground. He called out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And hath suffered all this for the remission of our sins. Wherefore we justly say with the Apostle Paul, that we know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; we count all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord: in whose wounds we find all manner of consolation. Neither is it necessary to seek or invent any other means of being reconciled to God, than this only sacrifice, once offered, by which believers are made perfect forever. This is also the reason why he

was called by the angel of God, JESUS, that is to say, SAVIOUR, because he should save his people from their sins”.

- c) **The Second Helvetic Confession**, of 1566 follows Calvin, but does not stress the active obedience of Christ in the atonement, being based “solely on account of Christ’s sufferings and resurrection” (*Creeds*. 15, 255-56):

“We Are Justified on Account of Christ. Now it is most certain that all of us are by nature sinners and godless, and before God’s judgment-seat are convicted of godlessness and are guilty of death, but that, solely by the grace of Christ and not from any merit our ours or consideration for us, we are justified, that is, absolved from sin and death by God the Judge. For what is clearer than what Paul said: “Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23f.)”.

“Imputed Righteousness. For Christ took upon himself and bore the sins of the world, and satisfied divine justice. Therefore, solely on account of Christ's sufferings and resurrection God is propitious with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but imputes Christ’s righteousness to us as our own (2 Cor. 5:19ff.; Romans 4:24), so that now we are not only cleansed and purged from sins or are holy, but also, granted the righteousness of Christ, and so absolved from sin, death and condemnation, are at last righteous and heirs of eternal life. Properly speaking, therefore, God alone justifies us, and justifies only on account of Christ, not imputing sins to us but imputing his righteousness to us”.

- d) **The Heidelberg Catechism, 1563** has a particularly instructive section (*Creeds*. II, 307-308, 311):

“Q.12. Since, then, by the righteous judgment of God we have deserved temporal and eternal punishment, how may we escape this punishment, come again to grace, and be reconciled to God?
A. God wills that his righteousness be satisfied; therefore, payment in full must be made to his righteousness, either by ourselves or by another.

- Q.13. Can we make this payment ourselves?
A. By no means. On the contrary, we increase our debt each day.
- Q.14. Can any mere creature make the payment for us?
A. No one. First of all, God does not want to punish any other creature for man's debt. Moreover, no mere creature can bear the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and redeem others from it.
- Q.15. Then, what kind of mediator and redeemer must we seek?
A. One who is a true and righteous man and yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is at the same time true God.
- Q.16. Why must he be a true and righteous man?
A. Because God's righteousness requires that man who has sinned should make reparation for sin, but the man who is himself a sinner cannot pay for others.
- Q.17. Why must he at the same time be true God?
A. So that by the power of his divinity he might bear as a man the burden of God's wrath, and recover for us and restore to us righteousness and life.
- Q.18. Who is this mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous man?
A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for a complete redemption and righteousness.
- Q.37. What do you understand by the word "suffered"?
A. That throughout his life on earth, but especially at the end of it, he bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race, so that by his suffering, as the only expiatory sacrifice, he might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and might obtain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

N.B. This Catechism stresses both active and passive obedience (311):

- Q.36 What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?

- A. That he is our Mediator, and that, in God's sight, he covers over with his innocence and perfect holiness the sinfulness in which I have been conceived".

C. The Church of England and the Atonement.

The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England does not have a particular section devoted to the meaning of Christ's death, but it does contain scattered statements. Article II reads: "Who truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, [?] and to be a sacrifice not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men." Again (Article XI), "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour." Article XV states:

"Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, from which he was clearly void, both in his flesh, and in his spirit. He came to be the Lamb without spot, who, by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world; and sin . . ."

III. THE WORK OF CHRIST IN THE POST-REFORMATION (SEVENTEENTH CENTURY).

As previously indicated, the doctrine of the Atonement received considerable attention in the era from Anselm through the Reformation. Toward the conclusion of the Reformation a biblicistic rationalism became evident in the Protestant churches. The radical form of his hermeneutic gave rise to the resurgence of Unitarian ideas particularly in Servetus and Socinius; the moderate form gave rise to Grotius' reevaluation of the atonement.

A. Faustus Socinius and the Atonement.

The Socinian Movement began in the late sixteenth century through the teachings of Michael Servetus, but most particularly through Faustus Socinius as a movement within the Reformed Church of Poland.

In order to understand their view of Christ's death one must presuppose their Unitarian, monarchian view of the person of Christ. The "rationalism" of the Socinian Movement is clearly seen in the doctrine of Christ's death.

1. **Socinius and the Justice of God.** Socinius built his theology of the atonement upon a distortion of God's attributes, that is, he subjected the justice and mercy of God to His will (justice and mercy are in His optional will). Sin, therefore, is what God determines it to be on the basis of a will divorced from His character. Shedd wrote (*History*, II, 378-79):

. . . it is plain that Socinius conceived of the attributes of justice and mercy as less central than will. By a volition, God may punish sin, or he may let it go unpunished. He has as much right to do the latter as the former. There is no intrinsic right or wrong in either case that necessitates his action. Justice like mercy is the product of his optional will. It is easy to see that by this definition of justice Socinius takes away the foundation of the doctrine of atonement; and that if it be a correct definition, the Socinian theory of forgiveness upon repentance is true. If sin is punishment only because God so determines; and if he decides not to punish it, then it is no longer punishable, —if punitive justice is the product of mere will, and may be made and unmade by a volition, then it is absurd to say that without the shedding of blood, or the satisfaction of law, there is no remission of sin”.

Socinius tells us “if we could but get rid of this justice, even if we had no other proof, that fiction of Christ’s satisfaction would be thoroughly exposed, and would vanish (*Works*. III, 1).” Hence man’s repentance (i.e., self-effort) causes God to will forgiveness and that alone. The Racovian Catechism states (chapter 8):

“What then is your opinion concerning this matter?

It is this; —that since I have shown that the mercy and justice which our adversaries conceive to pertain to God by nature, certainly do not belong to him, there was no need of that plan whereby he might satisfy such mercy and justice, and by which they might, as it were by a certain tempering, be reconciled to each other: which tempering nevertheless is such that it satisfies neither, and indeed destroys both;—For what is that justice, and what too that mercy, which punishes the innocent, and absolves the guilty? I do not, indeed, deny that there is a natural justice in God, which is called rectitude, and is opposed to wickedness: this shines in all his works, and hence they all appear just and right and perfect; and that, no less when he forgives than when he punishes our transgressions”.

2. Socinius on the death of Christ

- a) The attack on the Satisfaction View is waged in no uncertain terms in the Racovian Catechism (chapter 8) both from logic and Scripture:

“But did not Christ die also, in order, properly speaking, to purchase our salvation, and literally to pay the debt of our sins?”

Although Christians at this time commonly so believe, yet this notion is false, erroneous, and exceedingly pernicious; since they conceive that Christ suffered an equivalent punishment for our sins, and by the price of his obedience exactly compensated our disobedience. There is no doubt, however, but that Christ so satisfied God by his obedience, as that he completely fulfilled the whole of his will, and by his obedience obtained, through the grace of God, for all of us who believe in him, the remission of our sins, and eternal salvation.

How do you make it appear that the common notion is false and erroneous?

Not only because the Scriptures are silent concerning it, but also because it is repugnant to the Scriptures and to right reason.

How is this opinion repugnant to the Scripture?

Because the Scriptures every where testify that God forgives men their sins freely, and especially under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 5:19; Romans 3:24, 25; Matthew 18:23, etc.). But to a free forgiveness nothing is more opposite than such a satisfaction as they contend for, and the payment for an equivalent price. For where a creditor is satisfied, either by the debtor himself, or by another person on the debtor's behalf, it cannot with truth be said of him that he freely forgives the debt”.

N.B. Socinius then argues that “free forgiveness” leads to libertinism and is contrary to God's character:

“State in what manner this opinion is pernicious?”

Because it opens a door to licentiousness, or at least, invites me to indolence in the practice of piety, in what way soever they urge the piety of their patron. For if full payment have been made to God by Christ for all our sins, even those which are future, we are absolutely freed from all liability to punishment, and therefore no further condition can by

right be exacted from us to deliver us from the penalties of sin. What necessity then would there be for living religiously?"

- b) The Meaning of the Atonement.** The Socinians de-evaluate the death of Christ by stressing His resurrection. In answer to the question, What does it mean that Christ died for us?, Socinians replied (chapter 8):

"The second signification is, that Christ died for the highest benefit of us all. When Christ is said to have "died for us," the words may bear both these significations; which are therefore used interchangeably, the one for the other. Thus, what the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (chap. 14:15) wrote, "for whom" (pro que, uJper ouJ) that is, "thy brother," "Christ died"; —he wrote (1 Cor. 8:11), in expressing the same things, "for (or on account of) whom (propter quem, dij oJn) Christ died." For the example of those very victims which were sacrificed for men who had sinned, shows that no substitution of things equivalent to each other can be inferred from these words; and therefore that they were not offered as an actual compensation for an offence, but for the forgiveness of it. Nor indeed can any substitution be inferred from the words taken by themselves. For, not to proceed further, when the Scripture says (1 Cor. 15:3) that Christ died for our sins, it does not certainly declare that he died in the place or stead of sinners, but that he died ON ACCOUNT OF (propter, dia) our offences, as is stated in Romans 4:25".

But what is the meaning or purpose of the atonement if it is not a satisfaction of man's guilt and God's wrath? The Catechism states:

"But what reason was there that Christ should suffer the same afflictions, and the same kind of death, as those to which believers are exposed?"

There are two reasons for this, as there are two methods whereby Christ saves us: for, first, he inspires us with a certain hope of salvation, and also incites us both to enter upon the way of salvation and to persevere in it. In the next place, he is with us in every struggle of temptation, suffering, or danger, affords us assistance, and at length delivers us from eternal death. It was exceedingly conducive to both these methods of saving us, that Christ

our captain should not enter upon his eternal life and glory, otherwise than through sufferings, and through a death of this kind”.

Again:

“In two ways. First, because he did not suffer himself to be deterred from inculcating his doctrine even by the most painful death; but particularly, because he ratified the New Covenant by his blood, and confirmed the New Testament by his death (Hebrews 13:20). Hence the blood of Christ is called “the blood of the New Testament, which speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 12:24). And Christ is himself called “the true and faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5, 3:14). Secondly, because through his death he was led to his resurrection, from which principally arises the confirmation of the divine will, and the most certain persuasion of our resurrection and the obtaining of eternal life”.

N.B. According to the Socinians, the death of Christ is not a substitution, but a “Moral Impetus” founded on Duns Scotus’ doctrine of arbitrary will. Justice is destroyed; Christ encourages man to repent. If man will of his own ability, God will forget his character and grant forgiveness (i.e., the act of repentance is itself grace). Shedd said positively of the Socinian view (*Systematic Theology*. II, 385-86):

“The positive part of Socinius’ soteriology is found in the position, that forgiveness is granted upon the ground of repentance and obedience. There are no legal obstacles in the way of pardon, because the will of God is sovereign and supreme over law and penalty. Nothing is necessary, consequently, but sorrow for sin, and an earnest purpose to obey the commandments. Christ has set an example of obedience, and man is to follow it in the exercise of his natural powers”.

B. Hugo Grotius and the Atonement.

Aberrations to the Anselmic View of the atonement arise from two fountainheads: first, a failure to balance, or keep in balance, the attributes of God and, second, to deposit God’s will outside the expression of His attributes. The Socinians, the Grotians, and the Abelardians separate the atonement from a causation in God’s

nature for a cause within His “arbitrary will,” thus no penal substitution but simply a moral influence. That is, non-Anselmic theologians follow Duns Scotus by placing the atonement outside the necessity of God’s character.

1. Hugo Grotius: the Man (1583–1645) was a Dutch jurist and statesman who was enmeshed in the religious struggles of the Dutch church in the era of Dort. He was imprisoned by Prince Maurice for his non-Calvinism and later fled to Paris.
2. Hugo Grotius and the Atonement. Grotius’ view of Christ’s death is commonly designated as the “Governmental View” but has the same theological assumptions as Socinianism. Shedd wrote (*Systematic Theology*. II, 350): “As the Grotian theory is the best form in which the doctrine of a relative necessity of the atonement has been stated, as it has exerted considerable influence upon the history of this doctrine during the last two centuries, it merits a particular examination.” Grotius is summarized thusly by Gonzalez (*History*. III, 261-62): “Grotius developed an interesting theory of atonement, affirming that the reason that Christ had to suffer was not to pay the sins of humankind or to give us an example, but rather to show that, although God was willing to forgive us, he still considered the transgression of his law a serious offense that could not go without consequences.”
 - a) **Grotius’ Idea of Law** (i.e., Government). Grotius begins by establishing the law (government of God) as merely a product or effect of His will, not His will itself. “It is not something inward in God, or in the Divine nature and will, but is only the effect of his will.” Hence as an enactor of a positive statute, he has the same power to alter it, or to abrogate it, which the law-making power among men possesses. Therefore, penalty is not a necessary arrangement, not out of the nature of the law, but is an optional, mutable action by God. God can alter anything He wishes; that is, He can act contrary to His attributes! He writes (*Defense*. III, 310):

“All positive laws . . . are relaxable. Those who fear that if we concede this we do an injury to God, because we thereby represent him as mutable, are much deceived. For law is not something internal in God, or in the will itself of God, but it is a particular effect or product of his will. But that the effects or products of the Divine will are mutable is very certain. Moreover, in promulgating a positive law which he might wish to relax at some future time, God does not exhibit any fickleness of will. For God seriously indicated that he desired that his law should be valid and

obligatory, which yet at the same time he reserved the right of relaxing it, if he saw fit, because this right pertains to a positive law from the very nature of the case, and cannot be abdicated by the Deity. Nay more, the Deity does not abdicate the right of even abrogating law altogether, as is apparent from the instance of the ceremonial law . . . It is objected to this view, that it is naturally just that the guilty should be punished with such a punishment as corresponds to their crime, and therefore that punishment is not a matter of optional choice, neither is it relaxable. In answer to this objection, it is to be noticed that it does not always follow that injustice is done when justice is not done”.

N.B. Grotius’ reduction of everything to arbitrary Divine will is contrary to Anselm and the Reformers. The Reformers could not separate Divine will from Divine Nature, absoluteness is demanded by the Divine essence.

b) **Grotius’ Idea of atonement (relaxation).** Grotius, upon the above premise, claims that God simply relaxes the claims of the law (no real satisfaction) and saves sinners; God dispenses of the penalty. God deems it unwise and unsafe to remit sin without some satisfaction (he is not a total Socinian), so he grounds the necessity of the atonement in the creature, not in the attributes of the Creator!

Therefore to show His hatred of sin, which is moral evil, the sufferings and death of Christ become a mere exhibition (his death is not necessary except to prevent libertinism). The Satisfaction of Christ is not a payment of equivalent worth, but a nominal gesture.

N.B. This view is properly called “Relaxation” or “Acceptilation,” using Scotus’ term. Grotius calls it “satisfaction”, but this is a misnomer. There is no payment of debt, no one-for-one substitution, no vicarious suffering, simply a passive “slap on the arm”. Grotius’ view is between the Socinians and Reformers.

Grotius tells us:

That, therefore, he who sins deserves to be punished, and is therefore punishable, follows from the very relation of sin and the sinner to a superior power, and is strictly natural and necessary. But that any and every sinner be punished with such a punishment as corresponds with his guilt is not absolutely (simpliciter) and universally necessary; neither is it strictly natural, but only fitted

and accommodated to nature (*sed naturae satis conveniens*). Whence it follows, that nothing prevents the relaxing of the law which orders this punishment. There is no mark or sign of irrevocability in the law, in the case of which we are speaking, neither is the law accompanied with a promise; therefore, neither of these two things stands in the way of a relaxation of the law. Furthermore, a threat to punish is not like a promise to reward. For from the promise to reward, there accrues a certain right or claim on the part of him to whom the promise is made; but the threat of punishment only declares the transgressor's desert of penalty, and the right to punish on the part of him who threatens. Neither is there any reason to fear lest God's veracity should suffer in case he does not fulfill all his threatenings. For all threatenings, excepting those to which the token of irrevocability attaches, are to be understood as in their very nature diminishing nothing from the right of the author to relax them, if he shall think proper . . . At the same time, there are reasons that dissuade from the exercise of this right. These may arise from the nature of law in the abstract, or from the nature of a particular law. It is common to all laws, that in relaxing them something seems to be worn away from their authority. It is peculiar to this law (i.e., the moral law given in Eden), that although it is not characterized by an inflexible rectitude as we have remarked, it is yet very consonant to the nature and order of things. From which it follows, not indeed that this law is never to be relaxed, but that it is not to be relaxed with facility, or for a slight cause. And the all-wise Legislator had a most weighty cause for relaxing this law, in the fact that the human race had lapsed into sin. For if all mankind had been given over to eternal death, as transgressors, two most beautiful things would have utterly perished out of the universe—reverence and religion towards God, on the part of man, and the exhibition of a wonderful benevolence towards man, on the part of God. But in relaxing the Law, God not only followed the most weighty reasons for so doing, but also adopted a peculiar and singular mode of relaxing it, concerning which we shall speak hereafter (*Defense*. III, 353-54).

Perhaps a comparative chart will be helpful:

	<u>Socinians</u>	<u>Grotians</u>	<u>Reformers</u>
Purpose:	Unnecessary	Demonstrate the Government of God	Protect the Government of God and save the Creature

Fact:	Optional	Optional	Necessary
Focus:	Exemplary	Exemplary	Retributive
Result:	Encouragement	To prevent future sin	To deal with past, present, future sins

C. The Arminians and the Atonement.

The Arminians of Holland attempted to locate the atonement between the Grotians and Reformers, the principle formulators being Episcopius (1583–1643), Curcellaeus (d. 1659), and Limborch (1633–1712).

1. The Work of Limborch and Curcellaeus countered Grotius' focus of the atonement by contending that Christ's death as a sacrifice had reference to God as well as the universe. Curcellaeus wrote (*Opera Theologica*. 25, 300):

“That God might show how much he hates sin and might hereafter more effectually deter us from it, he willed not to forgive us, (noluit id facere) except upon the intervention of that sacrifice by which Christ offered his own slain body to him”.

Limborch is equally clear (*Theologia Christiana*. 26, 262):

“Our own view is that the Lord Jesus Christ was a sacrifice for our sins, truly and properly so called; by sustaining the most grievous tortures and the cursed death of the cross, and afterwards, when raised from the dead, by entering with his own blood into the celestial sanctuary, and presenting himself there before the Father, he appeased him angry with our sins, and reconciled us to him. Thus he bore for us and in our place the most grievous affliction, and so turned away from us deserved punishment”.

Having said this, the Arminian theologians vary from the Reformers by qualifying their statements (or by hiding things).

- a) The death of Christ is denominated a sacrifice, but a sacrifice not as the payment of a debt, nor as a complete satisfaction of justice for sin. Limbroch tells us that the satisfaction is not for all sin forever. Curcellaeus wrote (*Institutes of Christian Religion*. 19, 15): “Christ did not make satisfaction by enduring the punishment which we sinners merited. This does not belong to the nature of a sacrifice, and has nothing in common with it.”

- b) Christ’s sacrifice was not a substitute penalty, but a substitute for a penalty. A substituted penalty is a strict equivalent, but a substitute for a penalty may be of inferior worth by the method of acceptilation. Curcellaeus stated (*Institutes*. 22, 2):

“Jesus Christ may be said to have been punished (punitus) in our place, in so far as he endured the greatest anguish of soul, and the accursed death of the cross for us, which were of the nature of a vicarious punishment in the place of our sins (quae poenae vicariae pro peccatis nostris rationem habuit). And it may be said that our Lord satisfied the Father for us by his death, and earned righteousness for us, in so far as he satisfied, not the rigor and exactitude of the divine justice but, the just as well as the compassionate will of God (voluntati Dei justae simul ac misericordi), and went through all that God required in order to our reconciliation”.

Again a chart may prove helpful.

	<u>Socinians</u>	<u>Grotians</u>	<u>Arminians</u>	<u>Anselm & Reformers</u>
Purpose:	Unnecessary	Demonstrate the government of God & save the creature	Demonstrate the government of God	Demonstrate the government of God & save the creature
Fact:	Optional	Optional	Necessary	Necessary
Focus:	Exemplary	Exemplary	Retributive (substitute for a penalty)	Retributive (substitute penalty)
Result:	Encouragement	To prevent future sin	To deal with past sin	To deal with past, present, and future sin

Again:

The Example Theory Family

(Scotus' Arbitrary, Optional Will)

ABELARD

SOCINIANS (UNITARIANS)

GROTIANS ARMINIANS

The Substitution Family

(Necessitation)

ANSELM

REFORMERS

IV. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to trace the doctrine of the atonement from the Reformation to the Post-Reformation era. The Reformers stood in the thought of Anselm, although they refined their mentor in their study of the Scriptures. In the context of the embryonic stages of the rise of the Enlightenment, churchmen subjected their minds, and the Bible, to the unwise application of the scientific method (i.e., they rejected the possibility of external revelation which did not meet the criteria of inward (and might I add, fallen) logic). The Socinians and Grotians followed the option of Abelard and placed the atonement outside the nature of God in an “optional will of God”—Grotius calls it “Relaxation”, Scotius “Acceptilation”, but it denies the justice of God. The Arminian scholars reacted to the Socinians and Grotians, but did not adopt a fully Reformationist, Anselmic view because they made Christ’s death penal and substitutionary for the idea of God’s wrath for sin, but not the very payment of the individual sinner’s sin.