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Disputation 12

On the Necessity of Christ's Satisfaction: Part 2

I. In the foregoing discussion we have defended the necessity of Christ's Satisfaction, and we have demonstrated this by several arguments both from the nature and will of God. Because, indeed, this most wholesome doctrine has long ago been attacked by ill-tempered men and is still today being battered by the most pestilential heretics with various rams of arguments, which, unless we are prepared to deal with them, they may cause harm to pious students. But because we have received the arguments they make in opposition to us, with the goodness of God we begin this discussion briefly.

II. Whatever is opposed here by the adversaries may be gathered into three classes: In the first place they try to prove that God can forgive sins without satisfaction. In the second, not only God being able by nature, but also willing by decree, and that will has been revealed to us in the Word. In the third, He not only can and will, but,

indeed, cannot do the opposite without some dishonor of justice and cruelty. The first shows that Satisfaction is of a shallow divine nature and is contrary to God's supreme mercy and, thus, is not necessary. The second teaches that the same is resisted by God's will and so is false. The third seeks to impute an injustice to God.

III. With regard to the first, they reason in this way: If the satisfaction of Christ was necessary, it would be chiefly necessary in His name that there should be in God a kind of παρανορθωτικη [restorative] and vindictive justice essential to Him, which cannot admit the remission of sins without a certain prior satisfaction: But they say it is false to give the [kind of] justice to God which is natural to Him.

(1) Because what is essential to God is necessary and cannot not be.

(2) Natural things in God are not opposites, but mercy and justice are opposites because [according to the Reformed] in order for God to save in mercy He must destroy and lay waste in justice.

(3) That which is unequal and receives more and less is not of the essence of God, because in God all things are infinite. But mercy and justice are such, for He who has much mercy is said to be slow to anger; He who does justice only to the fourth generation, the same God extends kindness and mercy to the thousands, Exodus 20:5-6.

(4) If justice were essential in God, then He would necessarily have all pay their sins equally with punishments, so it would not be possible to have mercy on this one, while punishing that one, for He does not do nor can do anything that is contrary to His properties, e. g., since wisdom resides in God, He can never perform anything foolishly. Thus, if God is righteous by nature always and everywhere, and to the end that He ought to carry out justice righteously, yet [the justice we preach] is contrary to Scripture and experience.

(5) Finally, what is given freely is not given naturally, but justice is freely given because it is the effect of free will according to which it can freely punish or freely forgive the sins it wishes, just as it could create or not create the world.

IV. I respond: It is not difficult, however, to repulse this first attack of the adversaries. For apart from the fact that we have previously asserted sufficiently previously from the Scripture itself, as well as various reasons that essential justice of God is παρανορθωτικη, nothing is brought here to the contrary that cannot be easily refuted. For in the first place, it is false when they assume the justice of God could not have existed at one time because they cannot grasp it, let alone grasp that God is just and holy, nor does the argument adduced about the non-existence of sinful creatures prove anything, for justice must be distinguished from its exercise and its effects, which through metalepsis are often given the name 'justice' by choice, ενεργεια [working] with respect to δυναμει [power], Acts 1 & 2. Of course, if there had been no sinful creature, no exercise or ενεργεια of justice would have been seen working because it would require the presence of an object constituted in such a way that required it, but justice itself has always have been a root attribute in God, regarding the first act, for even if there had never been any sinful creature this would not cease to be the truest

proposition of God's nature, which is so holy and righteous that He cannot bear anything less, much less anything evil. Just as from eternity God was most holy and just, even though sin had not yet occurred, He was also merciful and gracious, although a wretched creature did not yet exist. Thus, it would have been possible for Him to possess these properties for eternity, even if no creatures had been either made wretched or sinful. Thus, although God had created nothing, omnipotence would not cease to be given in God, because He could always create what He created. So, although there was a time when no justice was necessary, that fact does not prevent His exercising justice when such a condition made it necessary. Bringing forth the relative attributes which have respect to creatures is necessary, but from the hypothesis posited it was not necessary for God to address men, but assuming that He willed to do so, He could not speak except truthfully because lying is unknown to Him. Thus, He could not punish if there had been no sin, but He necessarily punishes a sinful creature.

V. I respond to their second point: Distinguishing justice and mercy from their execution. For justice and mercy are not two things in God, let alone opposites, but one and the same essence of God, which is distinguished according to different objects and effects, not in itself, but with respect to us, and is called mercy when it has compassion on the poor, and called justice when it judges the guilty. Although the effects are contrary opposites, however, it is not vice versa: opposite effects always argue for opposite causes, since it is often even from the same causes opposite effects proceed. By the force of the same rays corpses stink and roses bloom, the same fire that hardens clay melts lead. Certainly, if God were to exercise his mercy and justice towards one and the same object and with respect to the same whole, it would appear, and not without reason, that this would be clearly *ἀσυστάτον* [inconsistent], because the one pleads what the other pardons, the same inflicts a punishment which the other takes away. But God did not establish this with Himself, nor did it ever occur to us. Indeed, we recognize and believe that the justice and mercy of God, through the wonderful *συζυγίαν*

[marriage] made by his πολυποικιλω [manifold] wisdom manifests itself in the work of salvation, but not in the same subject, nor for the same reason, since justice manifested itself in Christ, but towards us mercy: justice in punishing sin, mercy in saving the sinner. The object of merited justice is guilt, whether moral or physical evil which God cannot suffer, destroying what is foreign, that is, sinful, but the object of unmerited mercy is misery, which God for His immense goodness, always tends to remove from creatures.

VI. To the third point: Again, the heretics confuse justice and mercy with operations and results. For if mercy is said to overcome wrath, this must be understood not affectively but effectively, because it presents us with more effects of grace and mercy than of justice for the consolation of the pious. Thus, although these two properties are equally infinite in God, yet in God they have shown themselves in different ways towards men, so long as He neither spares all equally nor hardens all equally but does only as He pleases, the cause of inequality can be hidden, but it cannot be unjust, as Augustine excellently observed some time ago. If,

however, one inquires further why God is described to us in the Scriptures, I am inclined to mercy, as much as to justice, since the exercise of this power is no less than that which is natural to God. Various reasons can be given for this distinction:

(1) Because He has postponed the punishment of the greatest part of sinners into the future age, yet by His power He presently pours out an almost infinite abundance of benefits on His creatures, those things compel the hearts of pious men to place the kindness of God above the rest of His heavenly virtues.

(2) The actions that proceed from justice are equally praiseworthy in their kind as are those that proceed from beneficence, since they flow from the same source, but goodness itself is most delightful, for a good soul does nothing more willingly than when a benefit is conferred upon it. The effects of justice, however, are in themselves sad, for a good soul does nothing more unwillingly than to inflict misfortune, not because it exercises justice, but because the exercise of justice is considered evil for that someone. Since whatever is praiseworthy in men is of God, as they are wont to speak

of the eminent, the Scripture introduces us to the beneficence of God most willingly, but punishment almost unwillingly, because works of mercy are combined with the salvation and preservation of the creature but works of justice are associated with destruction and misery.

(3) When God punishes He does so out of the sole severity of justice, but in the works of mercy there is a combination of the various virtues of God, for when God does not grant pardon to any sinner except for a certain prior satisfaction provided for justice or even excelling justice, justice, peace and mercy kiss each other here. Therefore, it should not seem surprising if He is said to be more inclined to do that in which several attributes converge at the same time, because by it His glory becomes far more illustrious.

(4) Scripture speaks in this way especially regarding the faithful and the elect, with whom He acts out of the Covenant of Grace, it is clear He is merciful and most lenient and is, therefore, rightly called slow to anger and most inclined to mercy.

VII. To the fourth point: We must distinguish physical and brute necessity from ethical and rational necessity. The first analogy given is that those who act from that necessity always act in the same way until the last sphere of activity. Fire cannot fail to burn, and it always burns to the end where it meets some combustible object. But this does not apply to moral necessity because the exercise of that power depends on the freedom of the will, which can modify it in different ways. Thus, although it is necessary on the part of justice to punish sin, yet in that free distribution of punishment the heavenly Father's *επιεικεια* [clemency] can admit a certain economy, either with respect to the time while it is postponed, or the punishment itself while it is tempered, or of the persons while it is transferred, and therefore no fraud is to be considered to be done to justice, because it, indeed, wills every sin punished, but not every sinner equally.

VIII. He sins for the fifth time because: (1) It is a false hypothesis that 'free' and 'natural' are contradictory terms when, however, they cooperate with each other as friends. God's will is free and yet is natural to God; all the

properties that exist in God are free from the standpoint of the moral virtues because they are freely and spontaneously produced, and yet they are not arbitrary, but natural and essential.

(2) He supposes that to be 'free' is nothing else than possible and indifferent, but it has long been shown by the learned that poisons which are freed agree best with necessity, and that one and the same subject can act freely and necessarily at the same time. And it can be unalterably proven that this is highlighted by the examples of God, Christ, the Angels, the blessed, and even the demons themselves.

(3) Again, terms must be distinguished from those of our adversaries, namely, the cause of justice. Indeed, the cause of justice depends on the free will of God, but justice itself in the first movement is not caused by free will [alone], although God's will is indeed free, but it also *necessarily* rejects sin.

(4) The comparison with that of creation is a false equivalence, for the latter revolves around a thing that is completely indifferent and that could be or not be, but the exercise of justice is occupied with a subject that is

necessary and that could not be done otherwise..... If the creature is holy and bears the image of God, God cannot but will to be good to it; if it is sinful, He cannot but will to punish it. Therefore, the freedom of these actions is not in the fact that they can be or not be, but only in the fact that what God does in this business He does willingly and without any coercion.

END OF PART TWO TRANSLATION