

**THE WORK OF CHRIST**  
**Part V: The Modern Church**

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.**
  - A. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).
  - B. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).
- III. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND KARL BARTH.**
- IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.**
  - A. In the Nineteenth Century.
  - B. In the Twentieth Century.
- V. CONCLUSION.**

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

The eighteenth through the current century has been an era of theological and philosophical reevaluation. The view of Theology Proper and Christology is but a shallow, hollow fragment of the Reformation era when theology was queen of the sciences and philosophy her handmaiden. It is not at all surprising to the student of theology that the work of Christ was also subjected to a misapplication of the scientific method resulting in radical changes. As Christ was humanized, so His work was evaluated in the same light as a “reaching out” to God. Christ’s work in the post-Reformation, as previously seen in the harbinger of Liberalism—the Socinians and Grotians, departed from a penal satisfaction to a moral influence or exemplary theory of the valiant, inspiring efforts of a good, wise man to gain victory over the difficulties of life. The purpose of this lesson is to review the nineteenth- and twentieth-century concept of the work of Christ as it evidenced a departure from the Anselmic-Reformation view.

**II. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMAN THEOLOGIANS.**

To understand the nineteenth century and its “new thinking” concerning the Scriptures is to grasp the history and impact of the rise of “Enlightenment Thought” with its bare rationalistic hermeneutic. This has been repeated in two previous lessons (4, 9), so that it need not consume us again.

A. **Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834).**

1. **Schleiermacher and Religion.** Schleiermacher reflected the philosophic orientation of his day by beginning his theology with man and projecting to the knowledge of God within the context of a subjective feeling of God-consciousness, religion being man's feelings of himself. This is why he defines religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence," a mixture of Pietism and his own creative thought. The Trinity is conceived through the teachings of Sabellius and Christ, in His carnate life, was the penultimate example of God-consciousness.
2. **Schleiermacher and the Word of Christ.** The function of the God-conscious Christ is to mediate, reveal that consciousness through the Church, the God-conscious community, to the world. How then does Schleiermacher understand that Christ does this? Schleiermacher recognized that Christ functioned in a threefold office (i.e., prophet, priest, and king). He divides His priestly work into two parts, active and passive. In Christ's active obedience, he denied that Christ was "a perfect fulfillment of the divine will." He wrote of the accomplishments of Christ's active obedience as a moral influence. He wrote (*Christian Faith*, 2, 456-57):

"The second point is this, that if we are to express ourselves with any accuracy we cannot say, either, that Christ fulfilled the divine will in our place or for our advantage. This is to say, He cannot have done so in our place in the sense that we are thereby relieved from the necessity of fulfilling it. No Christian mind could possibly desire this, nor has sound doctrine ever asserted it. Indeed, Christ's highest achievement consists in this, that He so animates us that we ourselves are led to an ever more perfect fulfillment of the divine will. Not only so; but He cannot have done it in the sense that the failure to please God which is present in us in and for ourselves, should or could, as it were, be covered by Christ's doing more than was necessary to please Him. For only that which is perfect can stand before God; hence even Christ Himself had (to put it so) nothing to spare, which could be distributed among us, whether we regard the completeness of His fulfillment in outward acts (which, moreover, for reasons which will emerge more clearly later, would be quite un-Protestant) or whether we regard only the purity of the inward sentiment.

"Neither can He have fulfilled the divine will in any way for our advantage, as if by the obedience of Christ, considered in and for itself, anything were achieved for us or changed in relation to us. The true view is that the total obedience—*dikaioma*—of Christ

avails for our advantage only in so far as through it our assumption into vital fellowship with Him is brought about, and in that fellowship we are moved by Him, that is, His motive principle becomes ours also—just as we also share in condemnation for Adam’s sin only in so far as we, being in natural life-fellowship with him and moved in the same way, all sin ourselves”.

Schleiermacher’s view of the passive obedience of Christ is essentially Abelardian, or moral influence. Christ’s sufferings for our blessedness should fill us with love, God-consciousness. He wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 458-59):

“. . . And from this presentation it must be possible to deduce whatever in the way of appropriation of Christ’s suffering (as distinct from its exemplary value, which belongs to His prophetic office) has proved fruitful in Christian piety. Even that form of the doctrine which sometimes appears one-sided, and which concentrates the whole power of redemption almost exclusively in the suffering of Christ, and so finds satisfaction in the suffering of Christ, and so finds satisfaction in this alone, may readily be understood in this light. For in His suffering unto death, occasioned by His steadfastness, there is manifested to us an absolutely self-denying love; and in this there is represented to us with perfect vividness the way in which God was in Him to reconcile the world to Himself, just as it is in His suffering that we feel most perfectly how imperturbable was His blessedness. Hence it may be said that the conviction both of His holiness and of His blessedness always comes to us primarily as we lose ourselves in the thought of His suffering. And just as the active obedience of Christ has its properly high-priestly value chiefly in the fact that God regards us in Christ as partners in His obedience, so the high-priestly value of His passive obedience consists chiefly in this, that we see God in Christ, and envisage Christ as the most immediate partaker in the eternal love which sent Him forth and fitted Him for His task.”

Schleiermacher then attacks what he calls the “triviality of the so-called ‘wounds-theology.’ ” He stated (*Christian Faith*. 2, 459-60):

“Although it seems now hardly necessary to stay to compare this simple presentation with those artificial constructions which never tire of bringing together all sorts of reasons to prove the necessity or the appropriateness of Jesus’ suffering and death, yet there still remain serious misunderstandings which we must dispose of. The first is this, that although it is in a specially impressive way from

His suffering that we gain a true understanding of Christ, yet this is no justification for the triviality of the so-called ‘wounds-theology,’ once very widespread but now almost obsolete, which thought to find the deep import of the suffering of Christ in its sensuous details, and hence, for the sake of allegorical trivialities, broke up into details the totality of Christ’s sufferings. Underlying this was a confusion of thought; what can only be attributed to Christ as a sacrifice or victim was transferred to His high-priestly dignity. The victim has no independent activity; it is completely passive in everything which happens to it. So Christ too was perfectly passive in respect of those details of His suffering as to which He had no choice, and which consequently are not to be regarded as being for Him significant elements in experience. The second misunderstanding is to take the formula, that through the suffering of Christ the punishment of sin is taken away—a formula perfectly correct when interpreted as explained above—to mean that He bore the punishment, that is, that His suffering was equal to the sum of the evils constituting the amount of the punishment for the sins of the human race, since otherwise the divine righteousness would not have been satisfied. For which it naturally follows, since the total sin of the human race cannot be reckoned anything less than infinite, that the suffering also was infinite. If now the suffering of Christ and His death, although limited to a definite space of time and relative to a capacity for suffering indefinitely diminished by His higher spiritual power, is thus to be equated to the total of human suffering for sin, postulated as infinite, then it is scarcely possible to avoid the supplementary assumption that the divine nature in Him also share in the suffering. This presentation of the matter, contradicting as it does the incapacity of the divine nature for suffering (a truth long recognized even in this doctrine), certainly can offer no defense to any serious attack by its opponents. But this misunderstanding only reaches its height in the view that the suffering of Christ is a transference of punishment in the still more exact sense that God (who nevertheless, according to the doctrine of the Church itself, is not in general the Author of punishment) appointed His suffering for the Redeemer as punishment, so that Christ is supposed to have felt the primary and most direct punishment of sin, namely, the divine wrath, as striking Him and resting upon Him”.

Schleiermacher pointedly rejects the phrase “vicarious satisfaction.” He wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 461): “But this satisfaction is in no sense ‘vicarious’; it could not have been expected of us that we should be able to begin this life for ourselves, nor does the act of Christ set us free from the necessity of pursuing this spiritual life by our own endeavors in fellowship

with him.” He would accept the word “vicarious” if used as a synonym for sympathetic. Then he wrote (*Christian Faith*. 2, 461-62):

“If, however, we wish to regard these two aspects of the high-priestly office of Christ in their indivisibility (that is, so far as it is possible to include the suffering under the activity), then we may turn the expression about, and call Christ our satisfying representative; in the sense, first, that in virtue of His ideal dignity He so represents, in His redemptive activity, the perfecting of human nature, that in virtue of our having become one with Him God sees and regards the totality of believers only in Him; and, second, that His sympathy with sin, which was strong enough to stimulate a redemptive activity sufficient for the assumption of all men into His vital fellowship, and the absolute power of which is most perfectly exhibited in His free surrender of Himself to death, perpetually serves to make complete and perfect our imperfect consciousness of sin. It was just like the complementary sacrifice of the High Priest: that had special reference to those trespasses which had not been consciously recognized, so that his sympathy, regarded as the source of his action, took the place of that consciousness, and the people then felt themselves as free from all anxiety about divine punishment for the sins they had committed as if each one himself had fulfilled everything that the law required where there was consciousness of sin.”

His idea of Christ “representing” the sinner has resemblance to a penal substitution. He told us (*Christian Faith*. 2, 463-64):

“. . . The New Testament passages upon which the use of the term is chiefly based give little definite guidance, since it is not clear that in all of them the reference is to the High Priest; they seem rather to proceed from different points of view. Hence we had better keep to the conception of the high-priestly function and bring in chiefly His appearing before God on our behalf. And, if in doing so the distinction mentioned above is observed, then the representation will consist chiefly of two things: Christ appears before the Father, first, to establish our fellowship with Him, and then, further, to support our prayer before the Father”.

Otto Pfleiderer summarized Schleiermacher distinctly at this point (*Development of Theology*, 117):

“. . . In the communication of the principle itself consists the work of Christ: his work as Saviour is that of imparting to others the strength of his consciousness to God; his work as Reconciler is the

communication of the happiness of this consciousness; effects which were at first the immediate work of Christ, but subsequently could only be produced by the continued operation of his spirit and example in the mind of believers. to the ecclesiastical dogma of vicarious satisfaction, Schleiermacher attaches the following meaning: Christ made satisfaction in so far that a source of inexhaustible blessing was opened in his person and activity as Founder of the Church; but this satisfaction is not vicarious, inasmuch as the blessing of it belongs only to those who also enter into fellowship with Christ; to his sufferings, on the other hand, a vicarious character attaches, since by virtue of his sinlessness, his own person would have been beyond the reach of the universal calamity connected with sin; but this form of substitution is not satisfaction, individuals in the Christian community having, as we all know, still themselves to suffer. In other words, Schleiermacher rejects the idea of a transcendental reconciliation through the atoning sufferings of Christ as the representative of mankind before God, and puts in its place the historical view of the matter, according to which Christ by the total impression of his personality had such a strengthening and beatifying influence on men's religious consciousness that they felt themselves saved and reconciled, that is, delivered, or gradually being delivered, from the hindering and miserable contradiction between the higher and lower self-consciousness."

**N.B.** The Abelardian view of the atonement will pervade the entire spectrum of nineteenth-century German liberal thinking!

**B. Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).**

Albrecht Ritschl is chosen as the second representative of that century, not because he departed from Abelard, but because of Ritschl's particular application of the Abelardian view. Schleiermacher applied his theory to the God-conscious life of the church, a narrow application; Ritschl applied the atonement to the world, the kingdom on Earth.

- 1. Ritschl and Religion.** Ritschl is essentially Kantian and Schleiermachian in his definition of religion in that he felt the essence of religion was somewhat the "common recognition of dependence on God" although in contrast to Schleiermacher he rejected the concept of "innateness." Religion, Christ, and God are simply "value judgments" (Feuerbian), reflections of one's self-concept. Christ is essentially the Christ of the Samosotians (dynamic Monarchians), the window of God. He is the religion about Jesus, not of Jesus.

2. **Ritschl and the Work of Christ.** To understand Ritschl's concept of our Lord's work, it must be conceived through the grid of His "vocation"; that is, in the foundation of the kingdom of God or of the universal ethical association of men as the divine object of the world. Ritschl is pointed in his disregard for a judicial satisfaction view of Christ's death. He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 473-74):

"It is unbiblical, then, to assume that between God's grace or love and His righteousness there is an opposition, which in its bearing upon the sinful race of men would lead to a contradiction, only to be solved through the interference of Christ. The righteousness of inexorable retribution, which would be expressed in the sentence *Fiat justitia, pereat mundus*, is not in itself a religious conception, nor is it the meaning of the righteousness which in the sources of the Old and New Testaments is ascribed to God. God's righteousness is His self-consistent and undeviating action in behalf of the salvation of the members of His community; in essence it is identical with His grace (v. 2:102). Between the two, therefore, there is not contradiction needing to be solved. It is unbiblical to assume that any one of the Old Testament sacrifices, after the analogy of which Christ's death is judged, is meant to move God from wrath to grace (v. 2:184). On the contrary, these sacrifices rely implicitly upon the reality of God's grace toward the covenant people, and merely define certain positive conditions which the members of the covenant people must fulfill in order to enjoy the nearness of the God of grace. It is unbiblical to assume that the sacrificial offering includes in itself a penal act, executed not upon the guilty person, but upon the victim who takes his place. Representation by priest and sacrament is meant not in any exclusive, but in an inclusive sense."

He concluded (*Reconciliation*, 477-78):

"Thus it is impossible to accept an interpretation of Christ's sacrificial death which, under the head of satisfaction, combines in a superficial manner His death and His active life, while at bottom it ascribes to the death of Christ quite a different meaning, namely, that of substitutionary punishment. I have shown how alien this interpretation is to the whole biblical idea of sacrifice as rightly understood, also how little the only utterance of Paul which points in this direction (Galatians 3:13) has to do with the idea of sacrifice, how exactly rather it corresponds with Paul's apocryphal conception of the Mosaic law, a conception which cannot as such be theologically binding (v. 2:248). I have shown that the asserted necessity of a penal satisfaction to God as a condition of the

exercise of His grace has no foundation in the biblical conception of God; on the contrary, it is an intellectual inference from the principle of Hellenic religion that the gods practice a twofold retribution, a principle further supplemented by the assumption that the original adjustment of the relation between God and man is to be interpreted in terms of a legal ordinance. It only remains, therefore, to show that the idea of a penalty borne for others in the manner in which this is here asserted, is as inconsistent with the conditions of moral life in the individual as it is foreign to the words of Christ.”

Having demonstrated that Ritschl rejects any concept of satisfaction, it now is logical to demonstrate his positive conception of the atonement.

**N.B.** Ritschl’s concept of sin is “a lack of fellowship with God,” so that the atonement’s focus is on reconciliation.

He wrote (*Reconciliation*, 468-69):

“When we investigated the Kingdom of God as the correlate of the thought that God is love, it appeared that this organization of men can be construed as the object and end of God’s love, only in so far as it is conformed to the type of its Founder, the Son of God. The harmony with God and likeness to Him which the Kingdom of God must maintain in order to be understood as the objective of God’s love, attaches to the said Kingdom only in so far as it is called into being by the Son of God, and bows to Him as its Lord (281). In other words, it is in the son of God that in the first place the Father’s love falls, and, only for His sake, on the community of which He is Lord. Moreover, if these relations are eternally involved in God’s will of love, it follows from our recognition of this fact, that the special significance Christ has for us is by no means exhausted in our appreciation of Him as a revelation conditioned by time.”

He stated his view of Christ’s “vocation” as he summarized (*Reconciliation*, 483-84):

“. . . In so far as the speech and conduct and patience under suffering, which make up the life of Christ, arise out of His vocation to exercise the moral lordship of God and realize God’s Kingdom, and are the perfect fulfillment of this vocation, even to the extent of His willingly and patiently enduring the pains of death, it follows from the relation of this purpose of Christ to the essential will of God, that Christ as the kingly Prophet is the



perfect revelation of God; that, in virtue of the motive which inspired Him, namely, love, and the lordship which in His estimate of Himself and in His patience He exercised over the world, He is equal to God; and that He is the eternal object of the Divine love, and as such also the ground of the eternal election of the community of the Kingdom of God.

“In so far as the unbroken faithfulness of Christ to His vocation not only exhibits in detail the religious relation of the Son of God to God as His Father, but always arises out of this relation, Christ maintains in His whole life His priestly relation toward God. If, therefore, His Priesthood is to be regarded as availing for others, it can only be in virtue of this fact.”

Swing summarized Ritschl at this point (*Theology of Albrecht Ritschl*, 108-109):

“. . . he emphasizes, as one of the essential elements, in Christ’s mediatorial work, what he considers as fundamental in the Old Testament conception of sacrifice. What Ritschl sees in the ministering sacrifices of the priest is ‘that which covers the people, or the individuals, before the presence of God. The gift, brought according to the divine order, is the covering or protection under which those in covenant with God are in thought brought into His presence. . . . In the sin-offering there is no rite which could signify any different conception from that of the burnt-offering and the peace-offering . . . . When God thus suffers the national community which is conscious of sin, to draw near Him in prescribed ways, in these acts the separation from Him resulting from sin is done away. This bringing near to a gracious God thus accomplished, is the ground of the fact that sins are forgiven, that is, that they no longer separate from God.”

**N.B.** Nineteenth-century German theologians conceived Christ’s work as Abelardian. The specific application of the Abelardian view took various semantical turns (God-conscious in the community, vocation in the kingdom), but the concept of moral influence or example remained dominant.

### III. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND KARL BARTH.

The importance of Barth has been rehearsed in previous lessons (4, 9), but it must not be forgotten whenever you pass from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. He is a massive theological influence away from the ideas of his training toward evangelical

perspectives (we have noted his orthodox statements on Theology Proper and Christology).

**A. Barth on the atonement.** When one approaches Barth on the atonement a sense of uncertainty, confusion, and perplexity emerges. Barth, like Ritschl, did not accept the threefold role distinction of Christ, feeling that it is impossible to separate, even in a discussion, His person from His work. Barth speaks of Christ bearing the punishment of sin, but the essence of the atonement is not the punishment of sin nor a satisfaction of the wrath of God—his focus is upon the result of the atonement, reconciliation, not its essence (there is no systematic treatment of the atonement in the *Dogmatics*).

**N.B.** Barth's different emphasis when it comes to express the meaning of the atonement makes it difficult to see his view of Christ's death.

My comments on Barth's view are taken from a chapter in the *Dogmatics* (chapter 4) entitled "The Judge Judged in our Place." Christ is conceived as the servant to perform the work of reconciliation; this occurs according to the title of our chapter. However, it is not a penal satisfaction and beyond this he is vague! He said that the judging of Christ does affect reconciliation. (*Dogmatics*. 4.1, 222-23):

"But what did take place? At this point we can and must make the decisive statement: What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgment on us men by Himself taking our place as man and in our place undergoing the judgment under which we had passed. That is why He came and was amongst us. In this way, in this 'for us,' He was our Judge against us. That is what happened when the divine accusation was, as it were, embodied in His presence in the flesh. That is what happened when the divine condemnation had, as it were, visibly to fall on this our fellow-man. And that is what happened when by reason of our accusation was, as it were, embodied in His presence in the flesh. That is what happened when the divine condemnation had, as it were, visibly to fall on this our fellow-man. And that is what happened when by reason of our accusation and condemnation it had to come to the point of our perishing, our destruction, exactly as it had to happen, but because God willed to execute His judgment on us in His Son it all happened in His person, as His accusation and condemnation and destruction. He judged, and it was the Judge who was judged, who let Himself be judged. Because He was a man like us, He was able to be judged like us. Because He was the Son of God and Himself God, He had the competence and power to allow this to happen to Him. Because he was the divine Judge come amongst us, He had the authority in this way—by thus giving up of Himself to judgment in our place—to exercise the divine justice of grace, to pronounce us righteous on the ground of what happened to Him, to free us therefore

from the accusation and condemnation and punishment, to save us from the impending loss and destruction. And because in divine freedom he was on the way of obedience, He did not refuse to accept the will of the Father as His will in this self-giving. In His doing this for us, in His taking to Himself—to fulfill all righteousness—our accusation and condemnation and punishment, in His suffering in our place and for us, there came to pass our reconciliation with God. *Cur Deus homo?* In order that God as man might do and accomplish and achieve and complete all this for us wrong-doers, in order that in this way there might be brought about by Him our reconciliation with Him and conversion to Him.”

Further he speaks of Christ as a substitute (*Dogmatics*. 4, 1, 230):

“ ‘Jesus Christ for us’ means that as this one true man Jesus Christ has taken the place of us men, of many, in all the authority and omnipotence and competence of the one true God, in order to act in our name and therefore validly and effectively for us in all matters of reconciliation with God and therefore of our redemption and salvation, representing us without any co-operation on our part. In the event of His, the Gospel history, there took place that which permits and commands us to understand our history as a history of redemption and not of perdition. It has happened fully and exclusively in Him, excluding any need for completion. Whatever may happen in consequence of the fact that Jesus Christ is for us cannot add to it. It can only be the consequence of that which has taken place fully in Him and needs no completion. We can speak of it only as we look back to the fact that this One has acted as very man and very Son of God, that He has acted as our Representative and in our name, that His incarnation, His way of obedience has had and has fulfilled as its ultimate meaning and purpose the fact that He willed to do this and has done it; His activity as our Representative and Substitute.”

When it comes to the Anselmic view he clarifies, or confuses our understanding of the above statements (*Dogmatics*. 4, 1, 253):

“The concept of punishment has come into the answer given by Christian theology to this question from Isaiah 53. In the New Testament it does not occur in this connection. But it cannot be completely rejected or evaded on this account. My turning from God is followed by God’s annihilating turning from me. When it is resisted His love works itself out as death-dealing wrath. If Jesus Christ has followed our way as sinners to the end to which it leads, in outer darkness, then we can say with that passage from the Old Testament that He has suffered this punishment of ours. But we must not make this a main concept as in some of the older presentations of the doctrine of the atonement (especially those which follow Anselm of Canterbury), either in the sense that by His suffering our punishment we

are spared from suffering it ourselves, or that in so doing He “satisfied” or offered satisfaction to the wrath of God. The latter thought is quite foreign to the New Testament. And of the possible idea that we are spared punishment by what Jesus Christ has done for us we have to notice that the main drift of the New Testament statements concerning the passion and death of Jesus Christ is not at all or only indirectly in this direction.

“The decisive thing is not that He has suffered what we ought to have suffered so that we do not have to suffer it, the destruction to which we have fallen victim by our guilt, and therefore the punishment which we deserve.”

**B. Bloesch on Barth’s Concept of the Atonement.** Donald Bloesch was a student of Barth and has written a helpful little work entitled *Jesus Is Victor!* His analysis of Barth at this point is helpful since he was his student.

1. First, Barth, says Bloesch, takes Christ’s death outside the sphere of humanity and it becomes a triumph of God’s love, a moralism (45-46):

“Yet in Barth’s thought can be seen a profound divergence from the satisfactionist or juridical view, which was accepted with only slight modification in Protestant orthodoxy. For Barth God’s forgiveness is not conditional upon a prior satisfaction for the hurt done to his glory, but this forgiveness itself satisfied the demands of his righteousness. The cross is to be understood primarily not as the fulfillment of a legal contract calling for the shedding of innocent blood but as the triumph of sovereign love over enmity and alienation, which invariably resulted in the shedding of blood. The sacrifice is performed not simply by Jesus as man but by the Son of God in the form of man. It is consequently a divine self-sacrifice: God not only demands but also makes the offering. In this perfect sacrifice the Old Testament sacrificial system is both fulfilled and superseded.

“Barth opposes the popular view that through the propitiatory offering of Jesus God changed from wrath to love. Instead he insists (in apparent agreement with Luther) that the work of Christ presupposes and does not create a gracious God. God’s wrath is not appeased or turned away by the blood sacrifice of Jesus: it is precisely in this sacrifice that his wrath is revealed—but as the obverse side of his love. The wrath of God is the purity and holiness of his love that will forgive at the cost of utter self-sacrifice but at the same time will never condone any compromise with sin. God’s wrath is therefore a means of grace as well as of judgment.”

2. Thus, the death of Christ is not so much an event as a revelation (47-48):

“In the Anselmian view God receives compensation for Christ’s death. The superfluous merit earned by the man Christ is credited to his brethren. In the Barthian view Christ’s death is a revelation that God’s forgiveness is assured to all men despite their demerits; it is an incomparable and efficacious sign that all men are now included in the kingdom of his righteousness. The message of the cross is not that merits are now available to the sinner that satisfy the law of distributive justice; rather the cross proclaims that God’s grace goes beyond the strict requirements of justice, that the law of retribution has been both duly met and abrogated by the forgiving love of God. The cross is basically to be understood not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation directed to eternity but as an incursion of divine grace into the arena of human history. The cross reveals that God has identified himself with our sin and misery and has thereby overcome and expelled the powers of sin, guilt, and death. Barth said that we are saved not from the hand of God but by his hand, even though this first note is not denied when seen in its proper context.”

Bloesch is classic, so I quote at length (50-52):

“Barth’s objectivistic and universalistic penchant can be seen in the peculiar twist that he gives to the concept of substitutionary atonement, as presented in his *Church Dogmatics*. IV, 1 and 2. In contradistinction to historical orthodoxy he affirms not a unilateral substitution but rather an ‘exchange’ whereby God condescends to man while man is taken up in the unity of the life of Jesus Christ. Whereas the humiliation is peculiarly associated with and manifested in the divine nature of Christ, the exaltation is realized in his human nature. In the self-sacrificing Son of God, who takes upon himself the burden of our sin and guilt, mankind is crucified and buried. In the triumphant Son of Man, who upholds and participates in the lordship and glory of God, mankind is exalted not as God but to God, to fellowship with him. The substitution is not a work that takes place outside of us and is then subsequently applied to us but a work in which our dying and rising again is enacted. It is not that Christ has borne the judgment of God in our place, thereby enabling us to escape judgment. Instead the judgment has been executed upon us in Christ, and therefore we and all men have already passed through this judgment. Salvation is not the imputation of the alien righteousness of Christ to those who believe (as in Luther) but the entering into a righteousness that has now become our own and that rightly belongs to all humanity. What occurs in the cross is more than the defeat of sin and the vindication of righteousness: there sin is removed from the life of man and replaced by righteousness. Berkouwer observes that for Barth the substitution lies not

in the traditional ‘not we, but He’ but in the destruction of the old man and the resurrection of the new. The man of sin is wiped out, and the new man, in whom we are all included, is raised in his place.

“Jesus Christ is portrayed as both our Substitute and our Representative, but these terms are laden with new meaning. He suffers the punishment of sin on our behalf, but only in a qualified sense can it be said that he suffers and dies in our stead, since we suffer and die in and with him. The substitutionary atonement connotes not so much the purchase of salvation by the blood of Christ (though he does not discount this motif) as the conversion of man to salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Barth does not break completely with the traditional understanding of substitution, but he reinterprets it in such a way that it appears that not only the objective but also the subjective change has taken place in Jesus Christ. His position is that in the life and death of Jesus Christ a destiny irrespective of his attitude or response. Barth sees in the event of the atonement not simply the removal of the penalty of sin but the renewal of the world.

“A second area of difference between Barth’s conception and that of much traditional theology is that he depicts reconciliation as having been accomplished in the act of humiliation and incarnation. The cross and resurrection simply confirm and reveal what has already taken place. He also speaks of these events as the climactic unfolding of the eternal decision of the Son of God to unite himself with human flesh for the sake of our salvation.

“We now come to Barth’s view that the events of the atonement happen in the realm of sacred or inner history (*Geschichte*), not objectively discernible history (*Historie*); only the latter is available to empirical investigation. It was possible to observe the crucifixion but not the reconciling work of Christ, which is hidden from all sight and understanding. The atonement which occurred in Him, he says, is an invisible atonement which is contrasted with any soul-and-sense relationship between us and Jesus as impossibility is contrasted with possibility, death with life, non-existence with existence.”

Thus, the cross is a moral conquest of the world’s evil by the Victor.

**N.B.** Barth’s doctrine of the atonement cannot be understood apart from his concept of Election, which he treats with primacy. Barth’s view of election is really the “electing Christ” and his “electing” appears universal. Unbelief is the denial of being elect. Faith is knowledge of election and the elector’s death is to cause people to recognize their election.

**N.N.B.B.** While Barth is quite encouraging in his doctrine of God and Christ's person, he is difficult, vague in the work of Christ. He appears to portray his nineteenth century heritage!

#### IV. THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE AMERICAN THEOLOGIANS.

When one turns to the American scene, the topic of the atonement must be treated in two segments. In the nineteenth century, within the Calvinistic tradition, a Grotian view emerged and in this century Classic Liberalism, NeoLiberalism, and the Radical Theologies emerged with a moral influence theory.

##### A. In the Nineteenth Century.

Within New England Calvinism, which in post-revolutionary America rapidly evolved into New England Divinity, the Anselmic view of Puritanism was de-evaluated and a governmental view emerged that was to penetrate the church down to grass roots evangelism.

1. **Jonathan Edwards, the Younger (1745–1801)** rejected the penal view of his father and introduced into New England Grotius' views (Ferm, *Jonathan Edwards*, 116). To Edwards the atonement was a demonstration that disobedience to moral government brings punishment. He wrote (*Works*. 2, 24-27):

“That is the atonement of Christ be considered as the payment of a debt, the release of the sinner seems not to be an act of grace, although the payment be made by Christ, and not by the sinner personally . . . . But, the fact is, that Christ has not, in the literal and proper sense, paid the debt for us . . . . The sense of this is, that since the atonement consists, not in the payment of a debt, but in the vindication of the divine law and character; therefore it is not at all opposed to free grace in pardon.”

Commenting on this Ferm wrote (*Jonathan Edwards*, 119):

“. . . The Christian life is obedience to the moral law, fitting in with divine government. The death of Christ is clear and unmistakable evidence that God will punish wrongdoing. Divine government must be upheld at any cost, and fear of vindictive justice becomes the weapon to enforce obedience. Paradoxically, however much other items of New Divinity dogma offended the spirit of the time, this theory blended well with the current political temper. Edwards himself wrote: ‘. . . So long as the established powers rule according to law, justice, and the constitution, none can pretend

that it is lawful to resist them.’ But ‘the apostle (Paul) did not mean to teach that it is never lawful to resist the higher powers’; ‘the truth is, and the whole spirit of Scripture sustains it, that rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God and for the good of the people; and if they do not, then in resisting them we are doing God’s service.’ If God’s government is not justly upheld by the King, armed rebellion and ‘vindictive’ punishment is not just desirable but necessary. If God’s government is not upheld by man, vindictive punishment is necessary for those who transgress His law.”

The Grotian View permeated New England Theology, dominating the schools and teachers from Edwards to Taylor (Taylorism) until the Abelardian innovations of Horace Bushell. The impact is even seen in the preaching of the gospel!

2. **Charles Finney (1792–1875)**, the great antebellum evangelist, clearly adopted the modifications of Edwards and Taylor. Finney begins his discussion of the atonement by denying the Anselmic view, although he sees penal substitution in the biblical terms (*Systematic Theology*, 271):

“I must say that the atonement was not a commercial transaction. Some have regarded the atonement simply in the light of the payment of a debt; and have represented Christ as purchasing the elect of the Father, and paying down the same amount in his own person that justice would have exacted to them.”

He further rejects the belief “that the atonement is the literal payment of a debt” (*Systematic Theology*, 281) and defines the atonement by saying that “the atonement of Christ was intended as a satisfaction of public justice” (*Systematic Theology*, 271). He then stated:

“His taking human nature, and obeying unto death, under such circumstances, constituted a good reason for our being treated as righteous. It is a common practice in human governments, and one that is founded in the nature and laws of mind, to reward distinguished public service by conferring favors on the children of those who have rendered this service, and treating them as if they had rendered it themselves. This is both benevolent and wise . . . the public service which he has rendered to the universe, by laying down his life for the support of the divine government, has rendered it eminently wise, that all who are united to him by faith should be treated as religious for his sake.”

- N.B.** The atonement is not for sinners, but for society at large.



## **B. In the Twentieth Century.**

The American churches adopted the teachings of Classic Liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in part, though not exclusively, from Germany. In the 1960s Post-Bultmannian theology bore fruit in the “Radical Theologies,” a parallel to the political radicalism of the day. An example of the “Radical Theology” relative to the doctrine of Christ’s death can be cited in Paul Tillich’s “Theology of Being.”

Tillich rejects the so-called Classic View because he thinks it negates responsibility, the Abelardian View because it negates God’s justice, and the Anselmic View because he feels it makes the mediator a “third reality” (half-god). Tillich, then, formulates an entirely separate view. McKelway wrote (*Systematic Theology of Paul Tillich*, 172):

“Atonement means God’s participation in man’s estrangement. The element of non-being which is eternally conquered in the divine life . . . is the suffering that God takes upon himself. We see in the Cross the divine participation in man’s estrangement. However, the Cross is not the cause but the effective manifestation of God’s taking the consequences of human guilt upon himself. When man participates in (accepts?) the New Being in Jesus as the Christ, he also participates in the atoning act of God. The atonement is God’s saving act in Christ, but in Tillich’s thought this act is not effective alone. It requires on the part of man ‘participation in the divine participation, accepting it and being transformed by it’.”

**N.B.** He denies the Anselmic view entirely for a Moral Influence-Example View. The atonement is a psychological re-evaluation in the light of the reality of “abridgement” from quasi-being to being; it is not so much actual as mental.

## **V. CONCLUSION.**

This lesson has sought to delineate the nineteenth- and twentieth-century conception of the nature and purpose of Christ’s death. Nineteenth-century Germans generally, if not totally, followed an Abelardian concept whether expressed in terms of “God-consciousness” or “eschatological vocation.” Barth’s view is definitely not Anselmic; at best he borders on the Grotian governmental theory, although it is better to leave him in a cloud of vagueness at this point. In this country the Grotian theory gained popularity in the early nineteenth century within New England Theology, in the early Modern Era the Abelardian theory, and in the 1960s Radical Theologies a psychological atonement prevailed.

**THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION (SIN AND GRACE)  
Part I: The Church Fathers and Apologists**

**Summary:**

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**
- III. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE APOLOGISTS.**
  - A. The Major Apologists in the East.
  - B. The Major Apologists in the West.
- IV. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGIANS.**
- V. CONCLUSION.**

**I. INTRODUCTION.**

The doctrines of sin and grace are vitally and inseparably linked. The history of the Christian Church has vividly illustrated that misconception and error in the doctrine of sin results in damage to the doctrine of redemption. Hutchinson captured this vital linkage when he said (*Problem of Original Sin*, 1), “The character of salvation which is in Christ can never be properly comprehended apart from sin which is in the sons of Adam.” Fisher noted (*New Englander*. 27, 468): “The one word which expresses both the nature and end or aim of Christianity is Redemption. The Correlate of Redemption is sin. Parallel, therefore, in importance with the doctrine of Redemption in the Christian system is the doctrine of sin. The two doctrines, like the facts which they represent, are mutually inseparable.” Alteration in the biblical teaching on the nature and capacity of man will inevitably bring changes in the content and appeal of gospel preaching.

It is to these vital doctrines, the heart of the gospel message, that our attention now turns to determine how the church has defined and formulated the nature of sin in man and the nature of the reception of salvation grace. Today, we trace the embryonic formulations prior to the determinate work of Augustine.

**II. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**

As the Church Fathers have evidenced a theological vagueness, a non-speculative spirit, in the previous doctrines that we have studied, it is also true of the doctrines of sin and grace. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 163): “For the most part, however, they are rehearsing the clichés of catechetical instruction, so that what they say smacks more of affirmation than explanation. While taking it for granted that men are sinful, ignorant and in need of true life, they never attempt to account for their wretched plight.”

**A. In the West**

1. **Clement of Rome**, who has given us the epistle *To the Corinthians*, (ca. A.D. 96/98), grants that men are in need of divine blessing, that “they may obtain thy favor” [chapter 61], which is only granted through Christ [chapter 16: “Ye see, dearly beloved, what is the pattern that hath been given unto us; for, if the Lord was thus lowly of mind, what should we do, who through Him have been brought under the yoke of His grace?”].
2. **The Shepherd of Hermas** seems to conceive of sin as outward acts and an inward desire, sins and sin; Hermas is the only Father to broach an idea of a sin nature with a rabbinical concept of a wicked imagination or desire (*Mandate*. 12.1, 1; 12.2, 2). Yet salvation is seen in a moral self-motivated context (*Mandate*. 12.6, 2). “If ye turn unto the Lord with your whole heart, and work righteousness the remaining days of your life, and serve Him rightly according to His will, He will give healing to your former sins and ye shall have power to master the works of the devil.”

**B. In the East**

1. **The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. A.D. 117–32)** contains the only hint that the Fathers connected man’s plight to the narrative of Genesis 3, but this reference is indirect [chapter 12: “For the Lord caused all manner of serpents to bite them, and they died forasmuch as the transgression was wrought in Eve through the serpent”]. He later suggests that the souls of infants are sinless [chapter 6: “He renewed us in the remission of sins, He made us to be a new type, so that we should have the soul of children”]. In a somewhat clear passage, he wrote (chapter 16): “But let us inquire whether there be any temple of God. There is; in the place where He Himself undertakes to make and finish it. For it is written; And it shall come to pass, when the week is being accomplished, the temple of God shall be built gloriously in the name of the Lord. I find then that there is a temple. How then shall it be built in the name of the Lord? Understand ye. Before we believed on God, the abode of our heart was corrupt and weak, a temple truly built by hands; for it was full of idolatry and was a house of demons, because we did whatsoever was contrary to God. But it shall be built in the name of the Lord. Give heed then that the temple of the Lord my be built gloriously. How? Understand ye. By receiving a remission of our sins and hoping on the Name we became new, created afresh from the beginning. Wherefore God dwelleth truly in our habitation within us. How? The word of His faith, the calling of His promise, the wisdom of the ordinances, the commandments of the teaching, He Himself prophesying in us, He Himself dwelling in us, opening for us who had been in bondage unto death the door of the temple, which is the mouth, and giving us repentance leadeth us to the incorruptible temple. For he that desireth to be

saved looketh not to the man, but to Him that dwelleth and speaketh in him, being amazed at this that he has never at any time heard these words from the mouth of the speaker, nor himself ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built up to the Lord.”

Yet at the same time salvation is conceived within a moral context, Christ the new lawgiver. He wrote (chapter 19), “Thou shalt work with thy hands for a ransom for thy sins.”

2. **The Homily of Clement (ca. A.D. 150)** has some particularly interesting statements relative to sin and salvation. This homily recognizes that all mankind is sinful and full of evil lust (13:1): “We are full of much folly and wickedness.” This state of sinfulness calls forth loudly for repentance which is not so much a change of mind as a change of habits by good works (16:4): “Almsgiving therefore is a good thing, even as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving than both. And love covereth a multitude of sins, but prayer out of a good conscience delivereth from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these. For almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sin.” Again, 8:6: “Keep the flesh pure and the seal (baptism) unstained, to the end that we may receive life.” On, (6:9): “But if even such righteous men as these cannot by their righteous deeds deliver their children, with what confidence shall we, if we keep not our baptism pure and undefiled, enter unto the Kingdom of God? On who shall be our advocate, unless we be found having holy and righteous works.”

**N.B.** Other examples can be cited, but the evidence suggests that the Fathers did not understand the nature and extent of sin. A better charge is perhaps vagueness. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 163): “Similarly, while enumerating all sorts of benefits bestowed by Christ, the Apostolic Fathers nowhere co-ordinate their main ideas or attempt to sketch a rationale of salvation.” Seeberg gives us this general summary (*History*. 1, 78-79): “There is a general agreement also as to the sinfulness and misery (especially death) of the human race, which is, through its disobedience, lost to God and given over to the folly of idolatry, the power of devils, and eternal perdition. The salvation which Christ has obtained and brought to men is quite differently described: (a) Forgiveness of sins through baptism, new creation. In *Hermas* and *2 Clement*, only the sins of the past are included. There is a great lack of clearness in conception; it is particularly noticeable that the significance of the forgiveness of sins for the whole subsequent Christian life is greatly obscured. ‘Righteousness’ is always merely an active, actual righteousness. (b) Communion with God, the indwelling of the Father, or Christ,

or the Spirit in the heart (Ignatius, Hermas). (c) Knowledge of God as the One God, the Creator, Lord, Father, etc. (d) The new law. (e) Eternal life as the reward of moral living.”

### III. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE APOLOGISTS.

The universality of human sinfulness and the need of divine grace in Christ in order to be delivered from it was acknowledged in a general form by the church. In constructing a more specific statement, the Ancient Church showed two great tendencies: one characteristically Eastern, the other Western. The questions were these: Is man’s power to do good diminished by sin, and, if so, to what extent? and What is the precise relation which the agency of human will sustains to the workings of the Holy Spirit in regeneration?

#### A. The Major Apologists in the East.

Of the Apologists, Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 166): “Their general view of human nature is dichotomist; they consider it to be a compound of two elements, body and soul. And they are unanimous that man is endowed with free-will.”

**N.B. Context:** The Apologists and Gnosticism. To understand the Apologist stress on free will is to understand that they were refuting the Gnostics who asserted that man was created sinful and that he had no free will. The Apologists refuted these views without much reference to the consequences of human apostasy in the moral agent, and the human will itself. Shedd wrote (*History*, 2, 29): “It was a natural consequence of this polemic attitude towards Gnosticism, that the anthropology of the second and third centuries of both the Western and the Eastern Church was marked by a very strong emphasis of the doctrine of human freedom. At a time when the truth that man is a responsible agent was being denied by the most subtle opponents which the Christian theologian of the first centuries was called to meet, it was not to be expected that very much reflection would be expended upon that side of the subject of sin which relates to the weakness and bondage of the apostate will.”

1. **Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100–ca. 165)** has a rather fully developed anthropology and soteriology. He argued that man has no choice in being born but that we have a choice, ability, to select the good as opposed to the evil. He wrote (*Apology*, I, 10): “But we have learned from tradition that God has no need of the material gifts of men, since we see that He is the Giver of all things. We have been taught, are convinced, and do believe that He approves of only those who imitate His inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of man, and any other virtue proper to God who

is called by no given name. We have also been instructed that God, in the beginning, created in His goodness everything out of shapeless matter for the sake of men. And if men by their actions prove themselves worthy of His plan, they shall, we are told, be found worthy to make their abode with Him and to reign with Him, free from all corruption and pain. Just as in the beginning He created us when we were not, so also, we believe, He will consider all those who choose to please Him, because of their choice, to be worthy of eternal life in His presence. Our creation was not in our own power. But this—to engage in those things that please Him and which we choose by means of the intellectual faculties He has bestowed to us—this makes our conviction and leads us to faith. Indeed, we think it is for the good of all men that they are not prevented from learning these things, but are even urged to consider them. For, what human laws were unable to effect, the Divine Word would have accomplished, had not the evil demons enlisted the aid of the various utterly evil inclinations, which are in every man by nature, and scattered many false and ungodly accusations—none of which, however, applies to us.”

This implies free will then is the basis of God’s dealings with men (*Apology*. I, 28): “Indeed in the beginning when He created man, He endowed him with the power of understanding, of choosing the truth, and of doing right; consequently, before God no man has an excuse if he does evil, for all men have been created with the power to reason and to reflect. If anyone does not believe that God takes an interest in these things, he will be some artifice imply either that God does not exist, or that though He does exist, he takes delight in evil, or that He is (as unmoved) as stone, and that neither virtue nor vice is a reality, but that things are considered good or bad only in the opinion of men: this indeed would be the height of blasphemy and injustice.”

**N.B.** Foreknowledge is defined as foresight; that is, that God does not so much predetermine man’s actions as foresee how by their own volitions they are going to act and so announces it beforehand. He wrote (*Apology*. I, 84): “Plato, too, when he stated: ‘To him who chooses belongs the guilt, but in God there is no guilt,’ borrowed the thought from the Prophet Moses. Indeed, Moses is more ancient than all the Greek authors, and everything the philosophers and poets said in speaking about the immorality of the soul, or retribution after death, or speculation on celestial matters, or other similar doctrines, they took from the Prophets as the source of information, and from them they have been able to understand and explain these matters. Thus, the seeds of truth seem to be among all men, but that they did not grasp their exact meaning is evident from the fact that they contradict themselves. So, if we declare that future events have been predicted, by that we do not claim that

they take place by the necessity of fate. But, since God has foreknowledge of what all men will do, and has ordained that each man will be rewarded in accordance with the merit of his actions, foretells through the Prophetic Spirit that He Himself will reward them in accordance with the merit of their deeds, ever urging him to reflection and remembrance, proving that He both cares and provides for them.”

Martyr has little conception of Original Sin and treats the sin of Adam and Eve, yielding to the devil’s devices, as simply a prototype of our sin. The nearest he comes to a corporate conception of sin is the assertion of a universal propensity conditioned by our environment (i.e., “children of necessity,” but no innate sinfulness). He wrote (*Apology*. I, 61): “We were totally unaware of our first birth, and were born of necessity from fluid seed through the mutual union of our parents, and were trained in wicked and sinful customs. In order that we do not continue as children of necessity and ignorance, but of deliberate choice and knowledge, and in order to obtain in the water the forgiveness of past sins, there is invoked over the one who wishes to be regenerated, and who is repentant of his sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of all; he who leads the person to be baptized to the laver calls him by this name only.”

2. **Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–211/16).** Shedd summarized Alexandrine anthropology when he wrote (*History*. 2, 31): “The most unqualified position, in reference to the power of free will in apostate man, was taken by the Alexandrian School. This was partly the result of the excessive speculative theology by which this school was characterized, and partly of its collision with Gnosticism.”

Clement understands that Adam was not created in perfected, uncontested holiness, but able to acquire virtue to enter into a state of salvation. The fault of our parents was that they used their wills errantly (i.e., indulged in sex). Therefore, they lost the immortal life of Paradise, and their wills became prey to sinful passions. All men have a spark of the divine in them and are free to obey or disobey God’s law. He understands that infants are exempt from sin as he stated (*The Instructor*. 4, 26): “The righteous Job said: ‘Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there;’ not naked of possessions, for that were a trivial and common thing; but, as a just man, he departs naked of evil and sin, and of the unsightly shape which follows those who have led bad lives. For this was what was said, ‘Unless ye be converted, and become as children,’ pure in flesh, holy in soul by abstinence from evil deeds; showing that He would have us to be such as also He generated us from our mother—the water. For the intent of one generation succeeding another is to immortalize by progress.”

Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 180): “His teachings seem to be that, through our physical descent from Adam and Eve, we inherit, not indeed their guilt and curse but a disordered sensuality which entails the dominance of the irrational element in our nature.” Clement also insists upon the necessity of divine influences in order to deliverance from sin, because, although man is able to commence moral improvement by the resolute decision of his will, he cannot bring it to completion without the aid of divine grace. ‘God,’ he remarked, ‘co-operates with those souls that are willing.’ ‘As the physician furnishes health to that body which synergizes towards health (by a recuperative energy of its own), so God furnishes eternal salvation to those who synergize towards the knowledge and obedience of the truth.’ In these extracts, which might be multiplied, Clement teaches that the initiative, in the renewal and change of the sinful heart, is taken by the sinner himself. The first motion towards holiness is the work of man, but it needs to be succeeded and strengthened by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Whenever, by virtue of its own inherent energy, the soul is itself willing, then God co-operates, and concurs with this willingness.”

Shedd summarized his views as follows (*History*. 2, 32-38): “Man, like every other spiritual being, can never lose the power of arbitrary choice. By means of this power, noble minds, at all times, here and hereafter, aided by that Divine Power which is indispensable to success, are lifting themselves up from ignorance and deep moral corruption, and are drawing nearer to God and the truth.”

3. **Origen (ca. A.D. 185–253/4)** maintained an eternal concept of the origin of the soul (pre-existence). Universal sinfulness is explained by a pre-cosmic Fall (i.e., no corporate sinfulness). Men are pure intelligences fallen from their splendor and united with bodies (*First Principles*. 2, 6): “Before the ages they were all pure intelligences (*noeó*), whether demons or souls or angels. One of them, the Devil, since he possessed free-will, chose to resist God, and God rejected him. All the other powers fell away with him, becoming demons, angels and archangels according as their misdeeds were more, or less, or still less, heinous. Each obtained a lot proportionate to his sin. There remained the souls; these had not sinned so grievously as to become demons or so venially as to become angels. God therefore made the present world, binding the soul to the body as a punishment. . . . Plainly He chastises each to suit his sin, making one a demon, another a soul, another an archangel.”

In short, unlike Clement and Western Apologists, Origen denies that Genesis account of the Fall. Origen holds that the human will includes both holy and sinful tendencies; that is, the will is the ultimate efficient



cause of action. He postulated, like Clement, that every act is a mixture of self choice and divine aid. He wrote (*First Principles*. 2, 9, 6): “We however are mere men; but since we do not wish to encourage the insolence of the heretics by keeping silent, we shall reply as best we can to their objections with such arguments as come to mind. In our earlier chapters we have repeatedly shown, with assertions which we are able to draw from the divine Scriptures, that God the creator of all things is good, just and omnipotent. When ‘in the beginning’ he created those things which he wised to create, that is, rational beings, he had no cause for creating them but himself, that is, his goodness. Since he himself, in whom there was neither variety, change or incapacity, was the cause of the beings which he was about to create, all the beings which he created were created similar and equal, for he had no cause for variety or diversity. But, as we have frequently shown and as we shall discuss again at the proper point, these rational creatures were endowed with the faculty of free choice; and they were induced, each one by his one free will, either to imitate God and so to advance or to ignore him and so to fall. This, as we have already said, was the cause of the diversity between rational creatures; its origin lay not in the will or judgment of the creator, but in the choice made by the creature’s own freedom. God then felt it just to order his creation in accordance with merit. So he drew the diversity of rational beings together into the harmony of a single world, in order to furnish out of these diverse vessels or souls or minds one ‘house,’ so to speak, in which there should be ‘not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble’ (2 Tim. 2:20).W”

## **B. The Major Apologists in the West.**

1. **Tertullian (ca. A.D. 155–240/60)** is perhaps the most outstanding figure in the West. As to the origin of the soul, he rejected Origen’s pre-existence theory and advocated a “traducianism” (i.e., sin is transferred from Adam as a unit with the body). Out of this concept of the origin of the soul comes Tertullian’s maxim. *Tradux animal, tradux peccate* (the propagation of the soul implies propagation of sin), that is innate sin and the soul’s origin are compliments. Shedd wrote (*History*. 2, 44-45): “His argument, drawn out in full, was as follows. If there can be a traduction of the soul, there can be a traduction of sin. If a free-agent follows the agent, and shares in all its characteristics; if, therefore, there be nothing in a continuous process of transmission from a generic unity that is incompatible with the nature of a rational and voluntary essence like the soul, then there is nothing in such transmission that is incompatible with the activity of such an essence, or, in other words, with the voluntariness of sin. If God can originate the entire human nature by the method of creation, and then can individualize this nature by the method of

procreation, it follows that he can preserve all the qualities of the nature,—its rationality, its immateriality, its freedom, etc.—in each of its individualizations, and from one end of the process to the other; for preservation is comparatively less difficult than creation from nothing. In other words, if mind, considered as an immaterial substance, does not lose its distinctive qualities by being procreated, but continues to be intelligent, rational, and voluntary at every point in the process, and in every one of its individualizations, then it follows that the activities and products of such a mental essence do not cease to be rational and responsible activities and products, though exhibiting themselves in that unbroken continuity which marks a propagation. It is evident that everything depends upon the correctness of the hypothesis that there is a *tradux animae*—that man is one generic nature as to his spiritual part as well as his physical, and that his entire humanity is procreated. Hence the importance attached to the Traducian theory of the origin of the soul, by Tertullian, and the earnestness with which he maintained it.”

Having said this much Tertullian was not consistent in his views, because he did allow for free will. While he holds that the human nature bears stain (“every soul is counted as being in Adam until it is re-counted as being in Christ, and remains unclean until it is re-counted”) (*Soul*, 40) and demonic influence, he speaks of human ability to effect change. “Some things are by virtue of the divine compassion, and some things are by virtue of our agency” (*Soul*, 21). Elsewhere he seems to minimize the human will for a monergistic theory of regeneration (*Soul*, 21): “And thus stones shall become the children of Abraham, if they be formed by the faith of Abraham, and the progeny of vipers shall bring the poison of their malignity. But this involves the energy of divine grace, more powerful than that of nature, and which holds in subjection to itself that free power of will within us which is denominated autexousion.”

In summary Kelley stated (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 176): “Thus Tertullian takes the view that, while Adam received from God true human nature in its integrity, the nature he passed on to his descendants is vitiated by an inclination to sin; an ‘irrational element’ has settled in the soul (*irrationale autem . . . coadoleverit in anima ad instar iam naturalitatis*). He is more explicit and outspoken about his sinful bias than previous theologians, in whose eyes corruption and death seem to have been the principal legacy of the Fall; but, although there has been much difference of opinion on this question, his language about ‘our participation in (Adam’s) transgression,’ and about the ‘impurity’ of unbaptized infants, can hardly be read as implying our solidarity with the first man in his culpability (i.e., original guilt) as well as in the consequences of his act.”

2. **Irenaeus (ca. 140–202)** following Tatian and Theophilus, teaches that man was created in the divine image with supernatural endowments and likeness (i.e., reason and free will) to God. The essence of Adam’s sin was disobedience that plunged the entire race to ruin (“through the disobedience of that one man . . . the many were made sinners and lost life” (*Against Heresies*. 3, 18, 7). In the Fall the image of God was destroyed, but remnants of the “likeness” (i.e., will) remain. He stated his concept of anthropology-soteriology thusly (*Against Heresies*. 4, 38, 3): “By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God—the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing (what is made), but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover (from the disease of sin); and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is he who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God.”

He further added (*Against Heresies*. 4, 37, 1): “This expression (of our Lord), ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will (toward us) is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, he has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His supereminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spuing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God, which also the Apostle Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, ‘But dost thou despise the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, being ignorant that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But

according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.' 'But glory and honour,' he says, 'to every one that doeth good.' God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this epistle, and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who did it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do."

He further stated (*Against Heresies*. 4, 37, 3), "All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man."

**N.B.** Irenaeus does suggest a solidarity between Adam and the race. Irenaeus sees man as a debtor in Adam (*Against Heresies*. 5, 16, 3): "And not but the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested himself, but (He has done this) also by means of His passion. For doing away with (the effects of) that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;' rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience, which was (wrought out) upon the tree (of the cross). Now He would not have come to do away, by means of that same (image), the disobedience which had been incurred towards our Maker if He proclaimed another Father. But inasmuch as it was by these things that we disobeyed God, and did not give credit to His word, so was it also by these same that He brought in obedience and consent as respects His Word; by which things He clearly shows forth God Himself, whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam, when he did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to none other but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning."

#### **IV. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGIANS.**

It is in the period of the theologians that the doctrines of sin and grace are most clearly delineated. Most particularly in the theological conflict between Augustine and Pelagius. Before we turn to that crucial conflict, a word is in order about some other theologians in the era.

**A. “Sin and Grace” before Augustine and Pelagius**

**1. In the East**

- a) **Athanasius (ca. A.D. 295–373)** speaks of a solidarity of relationship between Adam’s first sin and the race (*Incarnation. 4, 6*), “Thus death wielded its power more and more, and corruption gathered force against men; the human race went to destruction, and man, rational and made in the image of the Word, began to perish.” Athanasius does not suggest that man participates in Adam’s actual guilt, his moral culpability, nor does he exclude the possibility of men living entirely without sin.
- b) **Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329–89)** understands that the entire race participated in Adam’s first sin and fall (*Oration. 33, 9*): “But I am so old fashioned and such a philosopher as to believe that one heaven is common to all; and that so is the revolution of the sun and the moon, and the order and arrangement of the stars; and that all have in common an equal share and profit in day and night, and also change of seasons, rains, fruits, and quickening power of the air; and that the flowing rivers are a common and abundant wealth of all; and that one and the same is the Earth, the mother and the tomb, from which we were taken, and to which we shall return, none having a greater share than another. And further, above this, we have in common reason, the Law, the Prophets, the very Sufferings of Christ, by which we were all without exception created anew, who partake of the same Adam, and were led astray by the serpent and slain by sin, and are saved by the heavenly Adam and brought back by the tree of shame to the tree of life from whence we had fallen.”

To the fall, he traces a weakness of the will (i.e., ignorance and power). He wrote (*Oration. 45, 8*): “This being He placed in paradise—whatever that paradise may have been (having honoured him with the gift of free will, in order that good might belong to him as a result of his choice, no less than to Him Who had implanted the seeds of it)—to till the immortal plants, by which is perhaps meant the Divine conceptions, both the simpler and the more perfect; naked in his simplicity and in artificial life, and without any covering or screen; for it was fitting that he who was from the beginning should be such. And He gave Him a Law, as material for his free will to act upon. This Law was a commandment as to what plants he might partake of, and which one he might not touch. This latter was the Tree of Knowledge; not, however, because it was evil from the beginning when

planted; nor was it forbidden because God grudged it to men—let not the enemies of God wag their tongues in that direction, or imitate the serpent. But it would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the Tree was, according to my theory, Contemplation, which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter upon; but which is not good for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy; just as neither is solid food good for those who are yet tender and have need of milk. But when through the devil’s malice and the woman’s caprice, to which she succumbed as the more tender, and which she brought to bear upon the man, as she was the more apt to persuade—alas for my weakness, for that of my first father was mine; he forgot the commandment which has been given him, and yielded to the baleful fruit; and for his sin was banished at once from the tree of life, and from paradise, and from God; and put on the coats of skins, that is, perhaps, the coarser flesh, both mortal and contradictory. And this was the first thing which he learnt—his own shame—and he hid himself from God. Yet here too he makes a gain, namely death and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus, his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment.”

Gregory then stressed sovereignty and free will (*Oration. 37, 13*): “All men, He saith, cannot receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. When you hear this, ‘It is given,’ do not understand it in a heretical fashion, and bring in differences of nature, the earthly and the spiritual and the mixed. For there are people so evilly disposed as to think that some men are of an utterly ruined nature, and some of a nature which is saved, and that others are of such a disposition as their will may lead them to, either to the better, or to the worse. For that men may have a certain aptitude, one more, another less, I too admit; but not that this aptitude alone suffices for perfection, but that it is reason which calls this out, that nature may proceed to action, just as fire is produced when a flint is struck with iron. When you hear, ‘To whom it is given,’ add, to those who incline that way. For when you hear, ‘Not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,’ I counsel you to think the same. For since there are some who are so proud of their successes that they attribute all to themselves and nothing to Him that made them and gave them wisdom and supplied them with good such are taught by this word that even to wish well needs help from God; or rather that even to choose what is right is divine and a gift of the mercy of God. For it is necessary both that we should be of God. This is why He saith not of him that willeth; that

is, not of him that willeth only, nor of him that runneth only, but also of God. That sheweth mercy. Next; since to will also is from God, he has attributed the whole to God with reason. However much you may run, however much you may wrestle, yet you need one to give the crown. Except the Lord build the house, they laboured in vain that built it: Except the Lord keep the city, in vain they watched that keep it. I know, He says, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the victory to the fighters, nor the harbours to the good sailors; but to God it belongs both to work victory, and to bring the barque safe to port.”

- c) **Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395)** understands that the race does share in Adam’s fall by a diseased propensity. He wrote (*Of the Beatitudes*, 6): “Evil was mixed with our nature from the beginning . . . through those who by their disobedience introduced the disease. Just as in the natural propagation of the species each animal engenders its like, so man is born from man, a being subject to passions from a being subject to passions, a sinner from a sinner. Thus sin takes its rise in us as we are born; it grows with us and keeps us company till life’s term.”

**N.B.** Kelley understands that the theologians in the East advocated a synergistic view of the will (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 351-52): “Though falling short of Augustinianism, there was here the outline of a real theory of original sin. The fathers might well have filled it in and given it greater sharpness of definition had the subject been directly canvassed in their day. A point on which they were all agreed was that man’s will remains free; we are responsible for our acts. This was a vital article in their anti-Manichaeon propaganda, but it raised the question of man’s need of divine grace. The issue is usually posed in the terms which the later Augustinian discussion has made familiar, and so viewed their position was that grace and free will co-operate.”

## 2. In the West

**N.B.** It should be stated that in the West, Gnosticism did not pose such a potent threat; hence, the church moved to a monergistic concept of soteriology. The pressure from Gnosticism was less heavy, and the attention of theologians was being turned more to the effects of sin upon the will itself. As a consequence, less emphasis was placed upon the doctrine of human power and more upon that of divine grace.

- a) **Ambrose (A.D. 340–397)** appears much clearer than theologians of the East in the solidarity of the race with Adam. He wrote

(*Exposition on Luke. 7, 234*), “Adam existed and in him we all existed; Adam perished, and in him all perished.” Again, (*On the Death of Satyrus. 2, 6*): “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died. How should God restore me, unless He find in my Adam, justified in Christ, exactly as the first Adam I was subject to guilt and destined to death?” And yet he at times speaks advocating a synergism (*Exposition on Luke. 2, 84*): “In everything the Lord’s power cooperates with man’s efforts; our free will gives us either a propensity to virtue or an inclination to sin.” In numerous passages the grace of salvation will only come to those who make the effort to bestir themselves.”

- b) **Hilary (d. 368)** shared the common theological opinions of Adam’s origin and state, but is strongly given to synergistic impulses (i.e., assisting-cooperating grace). He wrote (*Psalm 119*): “In preserving our righteousness, unless we are guided by God, we shall be inferior through our own nature. Wherefore, we need to be assisted and directed by his grace in order to attain the righteousness of obedience. The persevering in faith is of God, but the origin and commencement of faith is from ourselves. It is the part of divine mercy to assist the willing, to confirm those who are making a beginning, to receive those who are approaching. But the commencement is from ourselves, that God may finish and perfect.”

**B. “Sin and Grace” in Augustine and Pelagius (next lesson).**

**V. CONCLUSION.**

The purpose of this lesson has been to introduce the topic of the doctrines of “Sin and Grace” in the early church prior to the full delineation in Augustine and Pelagius. The Church Fathers are, at best, vague and nonspeculative. The Apologists in the East, in their conflict with Gnosticism, so stressed man’s created goodness and freedom (against the Gnostic stress on fatalism and material evil) that they did not relate Adam’s first sin to posterity and, hence, stressed free will, or at least synergism. The Western Apologists and Theologians, without the negative influence of Gnosticism, were much more free to stress Genesis 3 and Romans 5 (i.e., solidarity of Adam and the race), but still did not see the effect of sin on the race as would Augustine and, thus, stressed assisting or cooperative grace (Synergism). All the early churchmen before Augustine stressed freedom of man within the confines of the “mere” assisting grace of God. Augustine now looms before us!