

## Belgic Confession 20 – The Nature of Salvation

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: We will now begin to move from the nature of Christ, which we have looked at over the past few sermons, to the work of Christ. What will be most notable, however, is a strong link between who Christ was and what he did for you. So give your attention to God's Word.

Our headings are:

Salvation embedded in the God-man

Salvation expressed in the God-man

Salvation extended in the God-man

Our goals are: That you will get a better understanding of how Christ saved you so that you can appreciate the work of Christ for you, and therefore worship God better with a more thankful heart.

We believe that God, who is perfectly merciful and just, sent His Son to assume that nature in which the disobedience was committed, to make satisfaction in the same, and to bear the punishment of sin by His most bitter passion and death. God therefore manifested His justice against His Son when He laid our iniquities upon Him, and poured forth His mercy and goodness on us, who were guilty and worthy of damnation, out of mere and perfect love, giving His Son unto death for us, and raising Him for our justification, that through Him we might obtain immortality and life eternal.

### 第二十条 论神在基督里彰显他的公义与怜悯

我们相信完全慈爱与公义的神，差遣他的儿子取了悖逆的人性，为的是补赎此人性，借着极其痛苦与死亡担当了罪的刑罚 1。因此，当他担当我们罪孽的时候 2，神彰显了他的公义在他儿子身上；就在我们身上倾倒下他的怜悯与仁慈，我们是犯罪的，应受咒诅，出自完全的爱，为我们的缘故牺牲他的爱子，以致于死，叫他复活使我们称义 3，借着他我们可以得到永生。（Translated by Rev. Charles Chao D.D.）

### Salvation embedded in the God-man

1. God, who was perfectly merciful, sent his Son to assume human nature in which he had to die for your sins. He didn't have to do this, but out of mercy he did.

Romans 8:32 - "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"

Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...

2. God's justice (公义) was perfectly met in Christ so God could save you from your sins. It is very easy for us to speak of God's mercy (like John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.), but it is not easy to speak of God's salvation through justice. Yet, the Bible speaks often times and in many places about God's salvation through justice.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified (被称为义) freely by His grace through the redemption (救赎) that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation (挽回祭) by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness...

"Propitiation" (赎罪祭, 挽回祭) is the satisfaction of God's divine justice.

3. Unless you get a sense of God's mercy AND justice, you will not have a proper view of the cross and of your salvation.

a. You would either be sentimental (Oh, Jesus loves me so much).

b. You will be cold (he died for me and that's all I care about).

Pastor Riddlebarger summarized this well: "The cross is the only means by which the holy God can deal with human sin so as to demonstrate his love for lost and fallen sinners while at the same time satisfying his holy justice."

It is dangerous to not maintain a balance between God's love and his justice. While John Calvin was famous in keeping this balance, other famous theologians tended to lean on one side or the other. For example: Luther leaned toward God's love, Zwingli leaned more toward God's justice.

4. Some people like to split (justice and mercy) between the Old and New Testament. Is God different in the Old Testament (justice) than in the New Testament (love) as some allege? Not at all! In the Old Testament, God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden (justice), and yet gave them the proto-evangelism (原始福音), the hope of the coming Christ (mercy). Later, all the sacrifices 献祭 (justice) of the Old Testament which pointed to Jesus as

our sacrifice, was the means by which the wicked were shown mercy. In the New Testament, God sent Jesus Christ to you (mercy) and yet he sent Jesus to the cross to be crucified (justice). Those who draw this sharp distinction, as dispensationalists often do, have a weak view of Christ. Even Christ's love would seem less, as God's justice would not seem as severe. This leads to our next point.

### **Salvation expressed in the God-man**

**1. God the Father (in mercy and justice) had to send his Son to fix man's problem of sin and enmity with God. He knew that man would not and could not remedy his problem;** man was dead in trespasses and sins.

**2. The Father knew that the God-man had to become Man for you to experience his justice and mercy.** Remember, Jesus was born of Mary, the oldest of her many children. His family line is in Matthew 1, and Luke 3. He grew up in Nazareth, like other children grew up. He grew in wisdom and stature. He grew tired. He was hungry. He was sad. He was thirsty. He cried. He had to be a man to take God's justice and show God's mercy because a man sinned. Without being man and suffering he could not please God and meet God's standard of justice.

**3. The Father knew that the God-man had to be God in order to face most severe and horrible death in his body – as your atoning sacrifice (赎罪祭).**

Isaiah 52:52 - He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

**a. The Father poured (not dripped) his justice out on his innocent Son** which should have been poured on you.

**b. Christ's angst – suffering - was even more intense because his Father turned away from him.** Remember Jesus words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." He had to be condemned millions of times. Put your name in the mix! Christ was conscious of every single person who would believe in him! Can you, a sinner, imagine being executed for a murder you did not commit?

**c. Christ suffering was made even worse because other people thought he was guilty.**

(When you see a man is sentenced to 150 years in jail...don't you think he must have done something really horrible? Imagine one being crucified – reserved for the worst - and slowly being killed!) But, brothers, it should have been you sweating and moaning and hanging upon the tree. Further, when you see the horrible suffering of Christ you will get a better sense of how sinful man's nature is that God had to punish him so severely.

**4. How does atonement (赎罪, 救赎) of Christ not work?** There are 2 main false theories about the atonement.

**a. That Christ's death was directed toward Satan. It is called the Christus Victor theory (基督得胜论).** They suppose that Satan controlled man so Christ gave himself as a ransom (赎金) to Satan to free you, and that victory was fully accomplished after he was raised from the dead. There is no great sense of God's great anger against sinners. Eastern Orthodox Churches (东正教) hold to this view.

**b. That Christ's death was directed toward man. It is called the Moral Influence theory.** The theory teaches that Christ sacrifice on the cross was done to teach you to sacrifice for others and you will be saved. There is no sense of God's great anger against the sinner. This is the theory of modern liberalism (自由主义) and liberal churches like the United Church.

**5. How exactly does the atonement (Christ's sacrifice) really take away your sins? What is the truth?** Christ's death was not directed toward Satan or toward man, but to God. (Note this error in the Chronicles of Narnia 纳尼亚传奇 book and movie. Jesus was not sacrificed to satisfy Satan and to buy you from his control. Right doctrines do matter!) The death of Christ appeases (平息) God's wrath against sin and satisfies the requirements of His justice.

Ephesians 5:1-2 - Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of

love, **just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

Here you see the proper weight of God's anger, the seriousness of sin, and the agony of the cross. The 2 estranged (隔离的, 疏离的) parties, God and man, enemies, are brought back together in Christ. And your salvation was completed by the resurrection 复活 of Jesus Christ. He lives, so you live.

Romans 4:25 - He was delivered over to death for our sins and **was raised to life for our justification.**

Romans 5:10-11 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to (使与...和好) him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, **shall we be saved through his life!**

### **Salvation extended in the God-man**

**1. The effect of Christ's atonement (his death and resurrection) is that man now has become immortal (不朽的, 永恒的) ...yes...immortal.** Before, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, but now you are permanently made alive. You will never die again; you can never die again. Rejoice in fullness – (unless you are Arminian 阿民念 and you have to hope that you can work hard enough to make sure you don't fall away)! The Reformed Christian can rejoice that salvation is eternal. You aren't saved with the possibility of a fall. You are saved forever.

**2. This eternal life that you get from Christ's atonement will be displayed in fullness in heaven.** Now you can know you have eternal life. You have that assurance (确据) in your heart. But it will all ultimately be experienced in heaven.

1Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And **thus we shall always be with the Lord.** (以后我们这或者还存留的人必和他们一同被提到云里, 在空中与主相遇。这样, 我们就要和主永远同在。)

### **Conclusion:**

The God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his Divine and human natures, **exhibited God's mercy and justice, to redeem those he loved.** God the Son, therefore, did not simply make salvation "possible," but made salvation sure (complete) when he died on the cross. If Jesus Christ died in the place of sinners, if he reconciled sinners to God, if he redeemed those for whom he was dying, if he propitiated God's wrath toward sinners, then these sinners are saved. There are no "if's," "and's," or "but's" about it. **This atoning act demonstrated God's most perfect love and mercy, which, at the same time, satisfied his perfect justice. So it is not faith and repentance that saves you, but the atonement of Christ.** By faith you receive what Christ did for you and you repent to show that you have received what he did.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

**1. Never take credit for your salvation.** Instead, see how you should have received the justice of God, and how God, in love, embedded and expressed your salvation in your Savior. Jesus took your justice so he could show you mercy.

**2. Do you see how indebted you are to God?**

**3. With thankful hearts, praise him, more and more, better and better, with greater sincerity.** Sing songs of praise. Tell others about Christ's wondrous works for you. Live a life of thankfulness.

Finally, to my non-Christian friend: Christ is the only atonement, the only sacrifice that God would accept to free you from your sins. Good works are not acceptable. Giving money to the poor is not acceptable. Only if you accept the finished, willing, sacrifice of Jesus on the cross will you be made acceptable. I pray you will see the hopelessness of your future apart from Christ and then that you will come to him.