

# **In Defence of a Legal Relationship as the Foundation of Justification and Imputation**

**by Wilson Thompson**

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We live in an age of apostasy, and are surrounded by circumstances, factions, and speculations, which must call into exercise all the latent powers of the soul of every one who wishes to defend the Truth, expose error, and feed the flock of Christ with a sound knowledge of divine things. In my examination of all the parties which now distract the religious world, {yes, the religious world, for the world has its own natural religion,} they all have one great point of agreement, on which they are all united; and that is, that Christ died in some sense for all of Adam's race indiscriminately; or, in other words, that the atonement made by Christ was equally for all men, if they will only embrace it on proffered or conditional terms. Now, my brother, you know that the Scriptures never taught, and the true church of Christ never believed this theory. Therefore there is, after all the long catalogue of sects and parties that so distract the world of the ungodly and persecute the church, but one great cardinal principle with them all, and that is redemption for all men.

All natural men build upon this in one way or another, and only differ as they reason and infer differently from the same position. The Scriptures contain the word of the Truth of the Gospel, or the word of faith which we preach. This every child that is born of God believes, and is therefore a "believer." I find but two general classes of people in the Scriptures: the believer is one; call these the saints, the brethren, or whatever they are called, yet these are the believers. On the other hand, call them sinners, the world, anti-Christ, or whatever they may be called, these are unbelievers; that is, they are infidels. The whole community therefore makes no more than the believer and the infidel. Whatever may be our zeal, our profession, our morality, the outward show or inward excitement of religious fervor and apparent benevolence, and display of piety and knowledge, still if we are not the believer we are the infidel; there is no medium or middle state betwixt the two. There is but one God or Mammon to be served and worshiped; there is but Christ or Belial to trust in. There is but he that believeth, and the infidel. All men love and cleave to one or the other of these, and hate and despise the other. They cannot approve and serve both at the same time. I hold that it is self-evident that on all points of reveal truth, the divine testimony never conflicts with itself; therefore in all cases where any point of revealed Truth is fully and fairly established by Scripture, there can be no other part of Scripture, when rightly understood and applied, that will contradict it. To admit such a confliction in the Scriptures, is to establish infidelity; for if the Scriptures contradict themselves, and establish conflicting points then their harmony is destroyed, their Truth impugned, and infidelity established. On any point, therefore, where I have one text, correctly understood and applied to prove it, I have all the texts in the sacred volume to corroborate and sustain it. But if I have not all to sustain my position, but find some to contradict it, I must re-examine my first position; for I must have all the

Scriptures or I have none. The church of Christ, as taught by Christ and His prophets and apostles and by the Spirit of Truth, have uniformly believed and defended the doctrine of special atonement, and the redemption and eternal salvation of all God's children, and of them only. On this point their faith has been constantly assailed by all the multiform host of infidels belonging to the religious world.

My position in the examination of this issue is this: Without a legal relation, oneness or union, there can be no legal imputation either of sin or of righteousness. Without such an imputation there can be no legal redemption, and without such legal redemption there can be no legal justification, and without such a justification there can be no eternal salvation from sin and from the curse of the law. To these points let us very briefly attend, and show, as we pass, the entire universal atonement system, and all the arguments relied on to sustain it, have a natural tendency to establish infidelity, and therefore cannot be of God.

1. Without a legal relationship, oneness or union, such as constitutes Christ and His people one in law, there can be no justice in the imputation of our sins to Him; or His righteousness to us. But such a relation and union does exist. Christ is the Husband of the church and she is His bride, or married wife. He has betrothed her to Himself as a chaste virgin from eternity. As all legal contracts of the lawful wife are legally imputed to her husband and He is held, legally bound to cancel them, and His receipt of payment is her indemnity from all such debts. This imputation is legal by virtue of the legal union or oneness of the conjugal relation, but in the absence of such relation as constituted them one in law, such an imputation is tyrannical, oppressive, unjust, and a violation of all law, human or divine; therefore no debts but those of the lawful bride of Christ can be legally imputed to Him, and it follows, of course, that no sins but those of the bride, can be, in law, or justice charged to Christ. Hence, a universal atonement, or to deny the real existence of such a union, is to accuse God of injustice, violate the death of Christ and make it of none effect, and therefore has a natural tendency to infidelity. Nor will a purposed or prospective union or oneness make it any better. It is not because a marriage is foreknown or purposed by one or both the parties that the imputation is legal and just, but because such a oneness is lawfully consummated previously to the imputation, and before any demand can be legally made on the man to pay the woman's debts. So also with the Shepherd and His flock; none but the lawful owner of the sheep can be legally held bound to atone for their trespasses; nor can his purpose to become the owner afterwards, nor his foreknowledge that these sheep will be his own sheep at some future time, make the demand on him just and legal; they must be his sheep, his own sheep by a lawful title, before he can be legally called on to atone for their trespass, for to impute their trespass to him, without the relationship of owner and property, lawfully established, the imputation and demand would be unlawful, unjust, oppressive and dishonorable in man, and it must be highly offensive to so charge the Almighty with injustice and cruelty to His own beloved Son. Hence again we see that the notion of an atonement for one more than Christ's flock is unjust, a violation of law and legal righteousness, and has a natural tendency to establish infidelity.

Christ is the Life, the Head, the Surety and the Savior of His body, the church, and, individually, they are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His

bones, therefore the imputation of all their penal offences are legally imputed to Him as their proper and legal Head and Life. But to demand and execute the Head and Life of the church for an imputation of capital offences committed by those who never stood in any such relation to Him, as members to their Life and Head, would be an outrage on all law and justice, and strongly tending to establish infidelity.

From this hasty glance, a legal oneness appears indispensable to a legal imputation of our sins considered either as debts or contracted, trespass committed, or capital offences involving the Head and Life of the offender, and that a denial of such an eternal union as will make the imputation legal and just, tends directly to charge God with injustice, vitiates the atonement itself, and establish infidelity inevitably. Therefore it cannot be the doctrine of Christ. Hence the doctrine of indiscriminate atonement is infidelity disguised.

2. Without a legal relation and imputation there can be no legal redemption: this follows of course, for redemption from under the law, from its penalty and curse, is the legal effect of a law-fulfilling and law-satisfying transaction. The legal oneness of Christ and His bride, His flock, His body and His members, shows, as we have seen, that the imputation of all our offenses was perfectly legal; therefore redemption by His blood, or by means of His death for the redemption of their transgressions that were under the law, {committed under the law,} was a law-fulfilling transaction, by which He has already obtained for us eternal redemption. All being legal and law-fulfilling, in Him we have redemption through His blood. Christ's blood and death could not so redeem us if it were not legal or law-fulfilling, and in the absence of such union as we have been contemplating no such legality appears; but the greatest violation of law and justice. Again, we see that the legitimate tendency of the doctrine of universal atonement, or indiscriminate redemption, is to establish infidelity; it cannot therefore be a Christian doctrine.

3. Without such a legal redemption as we have been contemplating there can be no legal justification. "It is God that justifies," and He justifies freely, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. But if no legal relation existed no legal imputation of our sins to Christ could be made, and of course, the demand on Christ to suffer and endure the penalty was an unjust infringement of law, order, mercy, and true benevolence; and God will never justify an ungodly sinner on account of an act of cruel injustice inflicted on His unoffending and innocent Son. To deny the oneness, or eternal union of Christ and His people, in a legal sense, is to deny the legality or righteousness of the imputation of our sins to Him, and the illegality of His death would follow of course, and redemption by His death would be vitiated, and justification could not be just, nor show justice in the Justifier. Approach this subject without a legal relation existing one must deny the oneness, and infidelity is the unavoidable result of the doctrine of an indefinite or universal atonement.

4. With such a legal justification from sin, and from the curse of the law, eternal salvation is predicated upon a legal righteousness, lawfully imputed to the sinner, which so fully absolves him from all condemnation in the stern eye of the law, his sins being so covered by a full equivalent that no stain can be found upon him. "The blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin," and so being freely justified from all things, we are saved from wrath through Him. This agrees with the experience of every new born child of God. His comfort and hope of salvation is built upon the obedience of Christ in His behalf; but if the obedience and death of

Christ was alike for all Adam's natural race, indiscriminately, no assurance whatever that He died for me can give me one gleam of hope or comfort while I have no evidence that every one of Adam's numerous progeny will be saved; for if one for whom Christ died is finally lost, I may be that one! And if His death has proved ineffectual in one case, it may in all cases, and so all Christian hope and comfort be forever blasted, and infidelity sustained. But we have not so learned Christ, if so be that we have been taught of God.

Having thus briefly glanced at a few things under the four general propositions, I shall leave it for you and all the brethren and sisters to improve upon. From my little reading, and what I have been taught by tradition, or otherwise, I find no example of universal atonement being attempted either by the heathen in their offerings to their gods, the Moslems, Jews, or Christians. The old patriarchs offered for themselves and their tribes only, and never for all men! This practice continued from the days of Cain and Abel until the giving of the law and the authorized priesthood. Under that priesthood relation and imputation were fully set forth. The priest was the patriarch, father or head of his tribe, for whom alone he offered, until the law had organized the twelve tribes into one nation; one tribe was then chosen in the relation of a brother to the other eleven tribes {Levi,} and the law recognized that relation in the priest to all the consolidated tribes, as a type of the Gospel Church under the priesthood of Christ. And here again is the doctrine of legal relationship and imputation of all the sins of all the tribes of Israel to the victim, by the confession of the priest who bear the names of the twelve tribes, and no more, upon his breastplate. All the offerings made by these priests were specific and limited to the twelve tribes of Israel, and to them exclusively.

This system of types, God ordained; but if Christ died for all of Adam's race, and without such a legal relation as we have contemplated, then all the types were lost, and perpetual disagreement and paradox exists between the divinely authorized system of types and the offering of Christ that the former cannot be the type of the latter, and such irreconcilable contradiction exist as to forbid the application of the types to their Antitype, and the harmony of the old and new volumes of inspiration would be distorted, and infidelity established as the unavoidable result. Wilson Thompson {Signs of the Times, 1856}