RESPONSE TO J. MATTHEW PINSON'S "THOMAS GRANTHAM'S THEOLOGY OF THE ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION"

James M. Leonard, M.A.

Rev. Leonard is Visiting Scholar, H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies and PhD. Candidate at St. Edmund's College, University of Cambridge and Vice President of the Society of Evangelical Arminians.

Thank you Dr. Lemke for inviting me to be a respondent, and thank you Dr. Pinson for your commendable paper outlining the differences and similarities between Arminian Baptists and Wesleyan Arminians.

When we biblical theologians and exegetes are confronted with the language and thought patterns of systematic theology, when we hear terms such as penal satisfaction or governmentalism, or passive and active obedience, or imputed righteousness, we sometimes experience a physical affliction called the *heebie geebies*.

However, as a biblical theologian and exegete, I'd like to suggest that Grantham's soteriological urgencies are not far removed from that of Scripture, even if systematics and biblical theology speak in different tongues. In this response, I would first like to do some translating between the two so that Grantham's systematics is more firmly undergirded by biblical theology, and then to invite Dr. Pinson to distinguish further Grantham's view of continuance in salvation as an Arminian Baptist from the Wesleyan Arminian view of continuance.

To show the intersection between systematics and biblical theology, I would like to use one of the four Gospels, Matthew in particular since this is my own area of specialization.

The urgencies for penal satisfaction are 1) God's holiness as innate and essential to his being, and not something which he merely possesses; 2) the necessity of the satisfaction of God's wrath—God does not simply decide to forgive sinners without sin being punished; 3) the sinfulness of man, and therefore his need to be saved from the coming wrath; 4) God's love, mercy, and eagerness to provide salvation; 5) Jesus as the substitutionary sacrifice who pays the sinner's sin debt; and 6) the believer's union with Christ whereby Christ's passive and active obedience is imputed to the believer. The question is whether

these urgencies are also the urgencies of the gospel in general, and of the Gospel of Matthew specifically.

Regarding the first two urgencies about God's holiness and the need for his wrath to be satisfied, Matthew's Gospel has as part of its narrative world the God of Israel as reflected in Jewish scripture. And so there is no need for Matthew to emphasize the holy character of God or to articulate a doctrine of divine wrath. Nonetheless, the wrath of God is abundantly revealed, for example, when John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath!" which foreshadowed Jesus' damning words, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Matthew's Gospel may leave open the question of whether God *necessarily* punishes sin or if he may arbitrarily pardon sin without satisfaction of his wrath. I would only note that the eternal fires of hell and the eschatological wrath of God are put in such extreme terms in Matthew's Gospel that it is difficult to conceive of our God condemning someone to hell unless God's very nature demanded it. Moreover, although enigmatic and subject to multiple interpretations, Jesus' words that he did not come to abolish the law, and his assertion of its abiding to the end would tend to affirm that holiness is part of God's innate nature and caution against the Governmentalist assertion that God sets aside the righteous demands of the law in order to pardon man's transgression. Thus, the first two urgencies of penal satisfaction have reasonable correspondence with the data in Matthew, even if the necessity of divine wrath is not formulated as a direct response to our modern query.

The third urgency is the sinfulness of man and his need to be saved. This is an explicit urgency of Matthew's Gospel which is broached even in the first chapter. The glorious and inglorious genealogy with all its celebration and shame conveys first of all the identity of the people who God is going to save, as well as the need for them to be saved. God's people are in captivity, live in the land of the shadow of death, and need to be redeemed. We see this so clearly even in Matthew 2, with the slaughter of the innocents which tells us that Jesus came into a world that desperately needs salvation.

This desperate need for salvation is closely related to the fourth urgency, that God's love and mercy makes him eager to save; and so, the angel declares that Jesus will save his people from their sins. Jesus himself conveys the heartbreak of the Father to save those who were not willing to be saved, as He cries out, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those 'missionaries' sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!"

Having shown that God wants to save, the question then becomes, how will he do so? Correspondingly, the fifth urgency of penal satisfaction is that Jesus is the substitutionary sacrifice who suffers divine wrath for sinners. Since Matthew writes his narrative in anticipation of the cross, he does not articulate this as emphatically as Paul, Peter, and John do in their post-resurrection reflections. Nonetheless, Matthew repeatedly conveys that Jesus must go to Jerusalem, that he must suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, and that he must die. Further,

in the divine authentication of Jesus' sonship at the baptism, the voice from heaven conveys what kind of sonship this entails; for the declaration, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," has echoes of Genesis 22 where Isaac was to be offered on Mount Moriah, as well as echoes of the Isaianic servant—God's suffering servant who endures the chastisement of our peace, and by whose stripes we are healed. Indeed, Matthew cites explicitly Isa. 53:4, "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." Jesus gives his life as a ransom for many and takes the cup, saying, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew's narrative may not formulate the penal satisfaction view as clearly as systematic theologians do, but the concepts that Jesus is innocent, that he is our substitute, that he bears our sins, and that his death has everything to do with our salvation are Matthean urgencies which do support penal satisfaction.

Penal satisfaction's sixth urgency is that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the one who puts his faith in Jesus, and that the believer shares Christ's righteousness through the believer's union with Christ. For Matthew's Gospel, this urgency is evident in the formation of the People of God consisting of those who decisively accept Jesus' universal call to the weary and burdened to leave their boats and nets and fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters and lands, in order to take up their crosses to follow Jesus. It is such people whom Jesus identifies as his mother and brothers and sisters, who are with him *inside* the house, reclining at the Messiah's table, and not outside where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are Christ's little flock, those who are united with him in his sufferings and in his coming exaltation. It is not because they have cast out demons in Jesus' name or cry out, "Lord, Lord" that their sins are forgiven, but because they are in fellowship with the Messiah who, in contrast to those to whom he "never knew," does in fact know them intimately, who freely shares with them the bread and cup, and who poured out his blood of the covenant, which is their only hope for forgiveness of sins. To such as these is the kingdom of heaven.

Union with Christ is further amplified in Matthew's Gospel by Matthew's unique emphasis on Christ's presence with his people. This is seen in the "God-with-us" inclusio which frames the Gospel. Just as the Gospel begins with "You will call his name Immanuel, which means 'God with us,'" so also it closes with the promise that Jesus will be "with us" even to the end of the age. Likewise, where two or three gather in his name, Jesus is there in their midst, united with his people. Matthew's language here is nothing less than an appropriation of Old Testament temple theology, the essence of which is that God dwells among his people. Importantly, it is not the holiness of the *saints* that make the Holy Land holy, or the Holy City holy, or the temple holy. Rather, it is God's presence that makes the Holy Land holy, and the Holy City holy, and the temple holy. Likewise, it is not some perceived sense of personal holiness of the saints that counts for anything, but rather the holiness of Jesus Immanuel who makes his people holy by dwelling in their midst.

One of the enigmatic ways that Immanuel theology is manifest is in the Matthean notion that whatever might be done to one of his people—to one of his disciples, to one of "the least

of these," is done to Christ himself. The depiction of the king separating the sheep from the goats on the basis of whether one ministered to "one of the least of these my brothers" who might be hungry or naked or ill or in prison, is not an exhortation to social programming, but an indication that Christ so abides with his disciples that any injury or blessing to a true disciple amounts to injury or blessing to Christ himself. This is so because they share an identity with Christ. This depiction is a reflection of the believer's union with Christ, for the term "one of the least of these" is a Matthean technical term for the disciple.

Throughout this Gospel, Jesus announces the kingdom as it is manifest in his coming, and that the newly formed people of God—those who answer the call to discipleship—share in it and are sanctified by Immanuel's presence. Although not explicit, the imputation of Christ's righteousness fits well within these Matthean categories in which the disciple and Jesus share in one another's history.

The question for us in light of Dr. Pinson's contrast of Grantham's view of the atonement with Goodwin's view, especially in regard to the later development of Wesleyan Arminianism, is how do people who have been included in the new People of God maintain their status as members? How does a true disciple continue in salvation once he has been included in the People of God (to use Matthean language), or once he is united with Christ (to use the language of systematics)? Is it through faith that he continues, as indicated by the Baptist Faith and Message, or is our continuance in the grace in which we stand dependent upon our doing good as the opportunity presents itself?

Our curiosity over this issue was piqued by guest chapel speaker Dr. Witherington yesterday who seems to hold to the traditional Wesleyan Arminian view. He made a passing comment on Matt. 6:14-15, which makes divine forgiveness for us contingent upon us forgiving others. In Witherington's magisterial work *The Indelible Image*, he conveys some very powerful points for Arminianism, although some points make Arminian Baptists nervous, to say the least. I quote now several passages with the hopes that Dr. Pinson can clarify Grantham's understanding of our continuance in salvation.

Dr. Witherington writes,

> Paul . . . believes that once people are converted, God expects them to actually go on and live righteous lives. Paul does not talk about Christ being righteous in the place of the believer or about the believer being clothed in the righteousness of Christ alone. Even farther off the mark is the notion that when God looks at believers, he sees only Christ and so neither holds believers accountable for their actions. . . . Were it the case that when God looks at believers, he only sees Christ, that in turn would mean that God is prepared to be deceived or at least overlook Christian sin and not hold believers accountable for it . . . . These ideas amount to a presentation to us of a God of legal fictions who in the end is less than totally righteous.

Witherington continues,

> Although initial salvation certainly comes on the basis of grace through faith and without first doing works of any kind . . . , there can be no doubt that working out one's salvation involves deeds, not just beliefs or trust in God. . . . It is a team project that he is referring to, and it involves actions.
>
> For Paul, then salvation is a work in progress . . . and it is neither finished nor completed until the eschaton. . . . Why is this so important to stress? Because Paul's eschatological ethics are grounded in this particular theology of salvation, a theology that says that good deeds, works, and holy behavior are expected and required of the saved, and that since salvation is not yet completed, apostasy by a true believer, however unlikely, is possible. Although good works will not by themselves get one into the dominion of God, clearly enough bad works, unethical behavior as listed in 1 Corinthians 6 and Galatians 5, certainly can keep one out of that final eschatological realm on earth. One is not saved *by* one's good works, but neither is one saved *without* them, if there is time and opportunity to do them" (emphasis is original).

Thus, Witherington claims that a person gets into the People of God by faith but is kept therein by doing good deeds and by avoiding bad deeds. However, while Matthew's Gospel says much about the holy behavior of Jesus' followers, Reformation Arminians would argue that such behavior is descriptive of those who are united with Christ but not the basis for the union.

Dr. Pinson's outline of Grantham's view of the atonement indicates Grantham's rejection of the later development of Wesleyan Arminianism's understanding of continuance in the faith as dependent upon works. In his reply to my response, I would ask that Dr. Pinson elaborate on his outline.

Jesus calls so graciously, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." We who are burdened recognize that we are deserving of the coming wrath, but have cast our lot upon Jesus for our eternal salvation, and have come to Jesus' sanctifying presence, believing that Jesus will save his people from their sins. Such is the theology of Matthew's Gospel, and such is the systematic theology of Arminian Baptist Thomas Grantham.