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“THEIR PECULIAR REDEEMER”: ROBERT SANDEMAN
AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
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December 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

“THEIR PECULIAR REDEEMER”: ROBERT SANDEMAN
AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

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Dedicated to Brianna, my Bride

Quad Mod Squad

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PREFACE

It has been a joy and challenge to write this capstone thesis for my program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The process of writing has been done under the shadow of many major milestones in my own personal life. The birth of my firstborn, Hudson, in June of 2021, and the birth of another son, Malachi, in May of 2023. On top of those two great joys, I also assumed the role of an associate pastor. At times, this present work and the accompanying pressures of my education took a back seat to my family and ministry. I would have it no other way! But I would be remiss to admit that reading old books and pamphlets, even from a controversial contrarian like Robert Sandeman, made me long to be a broad reader and searcher of truth from trusted sources. I hope to carry that longing into my pastoral ministry in order to be guided by faithful believers from all eras. Thinking more on the doctrine of Christ's atonement in this particular era of the history of the church, the eighteenth century, has made me consider many ways to minister more effectively and with greater conviction, even though I thoroughly disagree with the main individual of my writing.

This work is dedicated to my wife, Bri. While I sought to prioritize late night reading and writing sessions after the kids had gone to bed, there were many moments, days, or weeks when studies required my attention and presence in place of other good things. My boys, Hudson and Malachi, are a great reminder that there exist people in this world who could not care any less about views of the atonement in the eighteenth century, but would rather be wrestled, held, and read to by their father. Lastly, the Quad Mod Squad deserves memoriam. As the final group of men to go through the modular ThM at SBTS, we enjoyed brotherhood at Joella's, Taco Luchador, and wherever else

Jacob told us to eat. I am thankful for their friendship and their fellowship during our weeklong seminars.

Daniel Ackerman

Cedarville, Ohio

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT SANDEMAN

“The love of the truth gives resolution and boldness to men of the most timorous temper, and gives courage to suffer, though they should not be able to defend or contend for the same with the pen or tongue of Paul or Apollo; and Jesus Christ, in his invitation to sinners to follow him, speaks continually to this purpose, wanting none but such as were resolute for the kingdom of heaven, and ready to run all hazards for it.”¹ Such were the words of the “born controversialist”² and sectarian Robert Sandeman. Born on April 29, 1718, to David and Margaret Sandeman on the banks of the River Tay in Perth, Robert would eventually go on to adopt and promote the teachings of his father-in-law, John Glas (1695–1773), on both sides of the Atlantic. John Glas was the founder of the Glasite church, the “original” Dissenters of the Presbyterian body in Scotland during the late 1720s. Due to Robert’s submissive spirit to the Crown in pre-Revolutionary America, he was unable to plant lasting seeds in the colonies, and the Glasite movement that began to bear his name, Sandemanianism, petered out within a century.³ But the boldness and tenacity with which he wrote on issues such as the cross of Christ, the gospel offer, saving faith, and church practice helped shape the religious landscape of his day and beyond. Indeed, his view of the nature of saving faith and

¹ Robert Sandeman, *Copy of a Letter from Palemon to His Father, Written in June, M, DCC, XLV [1745]* (Dundee, Scotland: Printed at the Chronicle Office, 1835), 25.

² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Sandemanianism,” in *Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*, ed. Lady Catherwood and Ann Beatt (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2014), 172.

³ Though both describe the same movement, “Glasite” and “Sandemanian” are geographically distinguished. “Glasite” is an adjective of the churches and teachings of John Glas in Scotland. “Sandemanian” is an adjective of the churches and teachings of Robert Sandeman beyond Scotland.

congregationalism likely influenced Alexander Campbell of the Restoration Movement on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century.⁴

Early Life

Born during the burgeoning of Protestant dissent following the Revolution of 1688-89, Robert found himself in a time of unprecedented religious fervor. This heightened piety, though, did not seem to mark the Sandeman household of Robert's youth. The mild-mannered David Sandeman was a wealthy linen merchant and magistrate of Perth, but his wealth and judiciary role are perhaps telling clues as to his inability to maintain fellowship in the Glasite Church, which was founded upon Independent principles.⁵ On March 16, 1733, David wrote a letter of repentance to John Glas and the elders of the "Church of Christ" in Dundee, confessing, "I have preferred the lusts of this world to the hope of the glory to be revealed when Christ appears, and I have highly dishonoured him and grieved and offended his disciples."⁶ This was David's first, but not last, instance of apostasy from the Glasites. During a more prolonged period of withdrawal from communion with the Glasites, Robert admitted to his father, "You

⁴ For Campbell's view on the separation of Church and State, see Nick Kassebaum, "Alexander Campbell and *The Christian Baptist* on Church and State," *Restoration Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1969). For Campbell's view of saving faith and conversion, see Stephen E. Waers, "Common Sense Regeneration: Alexander Campbell on Regeneration, Conversion, and the Work of the Holy Spirit," *Harvard Theological Review* 109, no. 4 (October 2016): 615-16.

⁵ The Presbyterian minister David Williamson of Edinburgh remarked on magistrates: "but we deny them what God denies them, a Privative power to hurt the church and deprive her of her due; magistrates should be nursing fathers to encourage, and not step fathers to dwang the Church." In "A Sermon preached at Edinburgh in the parliament House. November 17th 1700, before His Grace James, Duke of Queensberry, His Majesties High Commissioner and many of the Nobilty, Barrons, Burrows, Members of the High Court of parliament" (Edinburgh, 1700), 19, quoted in Jeffrey Stephen, "Defending the Revolution: The Church of Scotland and the Scottish Parliament, 1689-95," *Scottish Historical Review* 89, no. 227 (April, 2010): 26. See also Stewart J. Brown, "Protestant Dissent in Scotland," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 2, *The Long Eighteenth Century c. 1689-c. 1828*, ed. Andrew Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 152-55. In Robert's letter to his father following his apostasy from the Glasite Church, Robert indicates his father's covetousness (of money and possessions) as a hindrance to his repentance. See Sandeman, *Letter from Palemon to His Father*, 7-8.

⁶ Sandeman, *Letter from Palemon to His Father*, 30.

have done your utmost, by rebukes and threatenings, and other ways of shewing your displeasure, to discourage us and turn us away from following Christ according to his word, and to tempt us to go along with you in joining the antichristian worship and practices.”⁷ His mother, Margaret, was apparently no help to David during this time and reverted to her default disposition of indifference toward religious devotion.⁸ While his parents periodically displayed signs of allegiance to the established Church and then to the Glasites, it never lasted long.

Unsurprisingly, Robert did not express much interest in committing to the ministry of the church until the end of his teen years. Despite his mother’s ephemeral seasons of allegiance to Christ, she still seems to have exerted enough influence on her son to consider studying theology at the University of Edinburgh, along with medicine.⁹ Shortly after a Glasite church was established in Perth, Robert enrolled at Edinburgh and studied for several sessions between 1734 and 1736. While there, John Glas and his companions came to Edinburgh with the intent to establish a church. While there, Robert slowly became convinced of Glas’s teaching on the nature of the Kingdom of Christ and “found himself obliged to relinquish all, and, instead of looking for preferment in the national church, was constrained to abandon his fondest wishes . . . [by] joining himself to Glas and his few friends.”¹⁰ In 1736, Robert left his textbooks behind without finishing

⁷ Sandeman, *Letter From Palemon to His Father*, 15. These “antichristian” practices were related to David’s joining of the national Church of Scotland.

⁸ Sandeman, *Letter From Palemon to His Father*, 23–24. Robert writes of his mother, “For however affectionate my mother has been to me and the rest of her children, and however careful of our well-being in the world, yet one thing is certain, she never was well affected to the Truth which we profess . . . I am pretty sure my mother has not been without convictions now and then . . . I have often been much concerned about my mother.”

⁹ This is according to John Howard Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion: A History of Sandemanianism in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 68. The author of this thesis has been unable to attain a copy of Smith’s source, “Biography of Robert Sandeman,” in *Discourses on Passages of Scripture: With Essays and Letters* (Dundee, Scotland, 1857).

¹⁰ Anonymous, *An Account of the Life and Character of Mr John Glas, Late Minister of the Gospel at Tealing, Near Dundee. To Which Is Added an Appendix, Containing a Short Account of the*

his program of study to return to Perth, join the Glasite church there, and apprentice in the weaving business of his family and later manufacture linen with his brother, William.

Not long after his return to Perth, Robert took as his wife Catherine Glas, the daughter of John, in 1737. Not much of their marriage is known, but Robert did write later in his life that the propensity between the sexes is the source from which “arises the nearest, and most enduring connections” marked by “a superior sentiment of delicacy and honour, of tender affection, and endearing love,” namely God’s institution of marriage between a husband and wife.¹¹ Sadly, Catherine died from a prolonged sickness just nine years into their marriage. Their union left behind no children and proved to be a turning point in Robert’s ministry, as he demonstrated a singular focus in serving the church of his father-in-law. In a song of remembrance concerning his late beloved, Sandeman intimates the ministerial drive he gained from his loss,

O let that tender kindness still
Me from all threat’ning dangers free;
So my vain life, by God’s good will,
An happy end like thine see.

No more shall sin and death annoy,
No fear suggest a secret groan;
The Lord’s thy everlasting joy,
Thy mourning days for ever gone.¹²

Proceedings of the Church in His Case, &c. &c. (Edinburgh: Printed by D. Schaw and Son, For W. Coke, Leith, 1813), lii. The main hurdle in Robert’s transition to the Glasites was the hardline stance they took on the separation of the Church from the governing authorities of this world. The national church was rooted in the Covenants of the seventeenth century, thus imbedding the inherent symbiosis of Church and State into the conscience of Scots everywhere.

¹¹ Robert Sandeman, *The Honour of Marriage Opposed to All Impurities: An Essay. By the Late Mr. Sandeman, Author of Letters on Theron and Aspasio* (London: Printed for T. Vernor, 1777), 3–5.

¹² Robert Sandeman, *Letter From Mr. Robert Sandeman to Mrs. Jeffrey in England. To Which Are Added Four Christian Songs, By the Same Author* (Edinburgh: Printed by J. Schaw, 1819).

Advances in Ministry

Surely, the familial connection between Sandeman and Glas was deepened through Robert's marriage to, and the tragic death of, Catherine Glas. Robert thrust himself into advancing the cause of the church in which he was an elder in both Dundee and Edinburgh, leaving behind his weaving business to begin preaching and publishing Glasite principles. Since Sandeman's letter to his father in 1745 was published posthumously and not intended for a general audience, the first true glimpse of Robert's public teaching is seen in a brief treatise entitled *Some Thoughts on Christianity in a Letter to a Friend* (1749). In this letter, Sandeman emphasized the total dependence of humans to have their hearts regenerated by the Spirit of God and the total power of the "apostolic weapons" (the apostolic testimony) to penetrate the "strong city" of the heart of man.¹³ The seeds of both strong Calvinism and apostolic primitivism, which defined much of Glasitism, germinated in Sandeman's famous publication of *Letters on Theron and Aspasio* less than a decade later in 1757.¹⁴

The impetus of Sandeman's much scrutinized *Letters* was the publication of the Calvinistic Methodist minister James Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio*, a dialogue between two characters that explored preeminently the doctrines of justification by faith and imputed righteousness.¹⁵ Hervey, a once-member of the Holy Club of George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers and a self-admitted "moderate Calvinist," walked the paradoxical line between the Reformation belief that one's salvation is dependent wholly on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for the elect people of God, and the evangelical

¹³ Robert Sandeman, *Some Thoughts on Christianity. In a Letter to a Friend. By Mr. Sandeman, Author of the Letters on Theron and Aspasio; To Which Is Annexed by Way of Illustration, The Conversion of Jonathan the Jew, as Related by Himself* (1764; repr., Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 19.

¹⁴ Robert Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio: Addressed to the Author*, 4th ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1838).

¹⁵ James Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio: Or, A Series of Dialogues and Letters, Upon the Most Important and Interesting Subjects*, 2 vols. (London: Printed for Thomas Kelly, 1824).

emphasis on the personal nature of Christ's atonement. In line with the Calvinists, Hervey confessed, "Tis true, the benefits of the new covenant are promised to penitents, as their happy portion; but never assigned to their repentance . . . Never to their repentance, but to the blood of the great High-priest."¹⁶ But what irked Sandeman was Hervey's insistence on the free offer of the gospel, that the atonement of Christ can be offered freely and personally. In a fictional conversation to the unbelieving Eugenio, Aspasio says, "Assure yourself then, my dear sir, that [Jesus] has done infinitely more for *you*.—That he has delivered *you* . . . That he has not only rescued *you* from endless destruction, but obtained eternal life and heavenly happiness for *you* . . . by bearing *your* guilt, and suffering *your* punishment."¹⁷ While John Wesley (himself an Arminian) thought Hervey a "deep-rooted antinomian . . . That is, a Calvinist consistent with himself," Sandeman believed Hervey's emphasis on feeling and thinking strongly enough about God for conversion smacked of a works-based soteriology.¹⁸ Sandeman's presentation of an intellectual faith in the bare facts of the apostolic testimony, which he believed upheld the sovereignty of God in salvation, is the overarching and enduring theme of Sandeman's *Letters*. This two-volume work sparked responses across denominational lines, including Hervey, John Wesley (1703–1791), Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790), Isaac Backus (1724–1806), and, most devastatingly, Andrew Fuller of Kettering (1754–1815). Of particular interest for the present work is how Sandeman understood and articulated the nature and extent of the atonement within his *Letters*, which will be considered below.

¹⁶ Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio*, 1:66.

¹⁷ Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio*, 1:185. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸ Smith, *The Perfect Rule of the Christian Religion*, 71. For an example of how Sandeman wrestled with the apparent dilemma of a "moderate Calvinist," see Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, 27–28.

Needless to say, Sandemanian teachings began to spread and cause debate and dissension. As an example, the Moravian minister Benjamin Ingham of Yorkshire (1712-1772), while searching out a favorable association for his churches following John Wesley's rejection of him into the Methodist movement, sent two preachers to Edinburgh and Dundee respectively to inquire more fully about the views of Sandeman and Glas. Returning to Ingham fully converted to Sandemanianism, their teachings spread like gangrene and sunk sixty-seven of the eighty Inghamite societies "which had flourished with all the evidences of permanent prosperity."¹⁹ The controversy in Yorkshire caused even George Whitefield to mourn and Selina, the Countess of Huntington, to write letters pleading with the preachers to cease their teaching.

An Independent church in London also suffered as a result of Sandemanian influence. This time, it was their pastor, Samuel Pike, who came under the spell of Sandemanianism through his reading of the *Letters* and personal correspondence with Sandeman.²⁰ When those in the church who sympathized with Pike split from the other members in 1760, they joined the Sandemanian church that was forming in London, which officially was established in April of the following year at the hands of Robert himself, who relocated to London to see his dream of the true gospel spread all over England.²¹

¹⁹ Abel Stevens, *The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism, Considered in Its Different Denominational Forms, and Its Relations to British and American Protestantism* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1858), 391–92.

²⁰ These letters were written between 1758–1759 and were published the following year as Robert Sandeman and Samuel Pike, *An Epistolatory [Sic] Correspondence Between S. P. and R. S. Relating to the Letters on Theron and Aspasio* (London: Printed by John Oliver, 1760).

²¹ For a fuller history of Pike's church, Three Cranes, on Thames Street, see Walter Wilson, *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southwark: Including the Lives of Their Ministers, from the Rise of Nonconformity to the Present Time: With an Appendix on the Origin, Progress, and Present State of Christianity in Britain*, vol. 2 (London: Printed by W. Button and Son, 1808) 67–103.

While his dream never reached the fulfillment he might have hoped for, mostly due to a lack of qualified elders to lead, Sandemanian churches did begin to sprout up throughout Great Britain. Sandeman had supplanted John Glas as the figurehead of their dissenting movement, as others who converted to their beliefs began writing to Robert with advice on practical church matters and doctrine. One example of this is in his *Essay on Preaching*, which was written in response to a young minister.²² In this short treatise, Sandeman highlights common topics of his theological system, such as apostolic primitivism related to ecclesiology, jabs at contemporary preachers (like John Wesley) for inciting a distinction between the “right and wrong way of believing,” and the relationship between justification and brotherly love. A true preacher ought to be one who “comes not proposing new regulations or refinements . . . but declaring and evincing, from the Scriptures, what God hath already done for the relief of those who are in desperate circumstances.”²³ According to letters sent to Robert from America, some of those in the most desperate circumstances were an ocean away.

Isaac Backus, in his religious history of New England, wrote concerning one of the factors behind Robert Sandeman’s missionary efforts in the colonies: “Mr. Ebenezer White, of Danbury, was a hearty friend to the revival of religion in our land; and when he read Sandeman’s letters, he manifested an approbation of his ideas concerning the finished atonement of Christ, and so did a majority of his church.”²⁴ As with Samuel Pike, White’s church split as a result of their minister’s adoption of Sandemanian values, most notably what Backus summarizes as his view of the “finished atonement of Christ.”

²² Robert Sandeman, *An Essay on Preaching. Lately Wrote In Answer to the Request of a Young Minister. By the Author of Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1763).

²³ Sandeman, *An Essay on Preaching*, 22.

²⁴ Isaac Backus, *A History of New England. With Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Newton: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 528–29.

But all this meant is that Sandeman had sympathizers. At the request of White and others, he travelled across the Atlantic with James Cargill, a Dunkeld elder, and Andrew Oliphant in October of 1764 and would remain in America until his death in 1771. He was able to establish several churches but was met with considerable resistance (as were his followers after he died).²⁵ Yet it does not seem likely that he would have enjoyed success had the circumstances been more advantageous. Only thirty days after landing in Danbury, Robert wrote a letter to Ebenezer White explaining the need to sever their involvement with each other. The cause of their disunion was a lack of evidence that Sandeman's teaching was bearing fruit in White's congregation, most likely due to the primitive peculiarities that marked all Sandemanian churches: foot washing, a love feast, and the kiss of peace.²⁶ Despite his best efforts, Robert Sandeman did not see his dream of a primitive church fully manifest itself in Great Britain or New England, yet his ideas and writings would prove to be influential for many others across the religious landscape.

A Summary of Sandeman's Legacy and Significance

Robert Sandeman was an eclectic writer. At the same time, he was quite predictable. Seeking to maintain the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, he voraciously defended the doctrine of justification through faith alone by grace alone. He viewed the atonement of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Mosaic law, definite in its extent, and limited to the elect of God. The truth of the gospel, that Jesus died "for the relief of those who are in desperate circumstances," was the assurance of Sandeman's life. His specific approach to applying this truth, however, was part of his demise. Based

²⁵ See Jean F. Hankins, "A Different Kind of Loyalist: The Sandemanians of New England during the Revolutionary War," *New England Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 1987): 223–49.

²⁶ Hankins, "A Different Kind of Loyalist," 226. Sandemanians were derisively called "Kissites." For standard practices of Sandemanian churches, see also Samuel Pike, *A Plain and Full Account of the Christian Practices Observed by the Church in St. Martin's-Le-Grand, London, and Other Churches (Commonly Called Sandemanian) in Fellowship with Them. In a Letter to a Friend. [Three Lines from The Acts]* (Boston: Printed by Z. Fowle, 1766).

on his view of the atonement, Sandeman could not make a universal offer of the gospel, in stark contrast to the “popular preachers” of his day. Based on his purely intellectual view of saving faith, many found themselves in the “cold sterile regions of spiritual frost.”²⁷ Based on his interpretation of Paul’s epistles, his view of church life seemed rather odd and unappealing to his contemporaries.

Despite all of this, I believe Robert Sandeman is a man worthy of study. For instance, he displayed a considerable sensitivity to the dangers of the First Great Awakening. Regarding the popularity of the revival preachers, Sandeman expressed concern for “the real hurt done to the consciences of many, in their most serious moments, by those leaders, who, along with what they tell the people about Jesus Christ, have the address to insinuate into their minds a high sense of their own importance.”²⁸ He is also worthy of study for the cautions we can learn from him, particularly how improper applications or logical progressions of orthodox theology can lead to heterodoxy and division within the church. This is precisely the case with Sandeman’s view of the doctrine of Christ’s atonement, which was in line with a great deal of his counterparts but contributed to teachings deserving of correction. The state of debate surrounding the doctrine of the atonement in the eighteenth century is where we will now turn to situate Sandeman within his theological context.

²⁷ Christmas Evans, *The Sermons and Memoirs of Christmas Evans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 255–57.

²⁸ Sandeman, *Letters*, 19.

CHAPTER 2

THE POPULAR PREACHERS' DOCTRINE OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

To examine the landscape of atonement theories in the eighteenth century, we will focus our attention on two figures who represent influential voices on the atonement debate in general and direct influence in the writings of Robert Sandeman particularly. These summative snapshots will provide a helpful framework for understanding the shared streams and unique inlets of Sandeman's doctrine of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection. First, the atonement according to George Whitefield will be considered, as Whitefield was easily the most influential evangelical preacher of the eighteenth century. And second, John Wesley's take on Christ's atonement will be examined, for Wesley's "departure" from a more thoroughly Reformed stance created quite the controversy and was the object of Sandeman's ire. These two figures, along with many more, are named in the *Letters* and categorized by Sandeman as "popular preachers." In context, this is a serious barb against those who, in Sandeman's eyes, replace Christ and "effectually assume the character and work of mediators betwixt God and the people" by their doctrine and preaching.¹ It is interesting to note from the start that the obvious differences between Whitefield and Wesley are of little consequence in Sandeman's appraisal of their writings and ministry. We will now consider some statements on Christ's atonement in each popular preacher.

¹ Robert Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio: Addressed to the Author*, 4th ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1838).

George Whitefield

According to a recent biography, “Whitefield was the most influential Anglo-American evangelical leader of the eighteenth century.”² Among the likes of the Wesley brothers and Jonathan Edwards, this is high praise! Yet the praise is due for a host of reasons, which cannot be adduced here.³ Needless to say, Whitefield’s understanding and application of the atonement is crucially important to providing a clear presentation of the doctrine in the time of Sandeman.

We must first note Whitefield’s understanding on the *extent* of the atonement, for this had prominent importance in his public ministry. That he held to a Calvinistic view of particular redemption is no secret. The doctrine of election, as a matter of fact, was one of the primary points of contention in his and John Wesley’s battles beginning in the late 1730s. In Whitefield’s illustrious preaching ministry, the answer to the question, “For *whom* did Christ die?” was of utmost importance for the validity of his “offering” Christ to others. In a letter to Wesley following the latter’s infamous “Free Grace” sermon of 1739, Whitefield described God as he “who hath appointed Salvation for a certain number.”⁴ Yet while Whitefield maintained that the benefits of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection were applied only to those who would trust in Jesus, this does not make the willful rejection of Christ’s suffering was the fault of God. In other words, reprobation remained the choice of humanity in Whitefield’s sight. Therefore, the intense, personal, and persuasive calls for sinners to repent of their sin was not a deceptive

² Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 260.

³ For a brief introduction to Whitefield’s life and legacy, see Digby L. James, “Who Is the Greatest Preacher? The Life and Legacy of George Whitefield,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2014), 23–40.

⁴ George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley: In Answer to His Sermon, Entitled, Free-Grace* (London: W. Strahan, 1741), 11.

strategy to fool people into conversion but was instead the outworking of his true belief that “Christ’s redemption will be applied to all that shall believe. Who these are, we know not, and therefore we are to give a general offer and invitation; convinced of this, *that every man’s damnation is of himself, and every man’s salvation all of God.*”⁵ In short, what Christ accomplished in life, suffered in death, and secured in resurrection was done in the stead of the elect of God.

Secondly, Whitefield found opportunities to emphasize the nature of Christ’s atonement in connection with the *fulfillment* of the law of God. It has been documented that the seventeenth and eighteenth century was no lax season for rampant immorality, which meant the message of the New Birth through faith in Christ was all the more important for calling sinners into new life with Christ through his redeeming work on the Cross.⁶ When speaking of the atonement, what is typically in view is the work of Christ in his *life, death, and resurrection*. The death of Christ on the Cross is rightfully the focal point of this doctrine, yet the Bible is quite clear that the redemptive work of Christ is not limited to his payment of the penalty for sin (i.e., his “passive obedience” highlighted in his sacrificial death), but also includes his work in fulfilling the strictures of the law (i.e., his “active obedience” highlighted in his life and ministry).⁷ Since the law amplifies the power of sin (Rom 7:5), the law needs to be made obsolete through righteous fulfillment.

⁵ George Whitefield, “To Mr. B—, June 29th, 1750”, in *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, vol. 2 (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1871), 363, quoted in Joel D. Houston, “With Their Salvation He Will Be Fully Satisfied: George Whitefield, Particular Redemption, and the Proclamation of the Gospel,” *Churchman* 134, no. 2 (2020): 168. Emphasis mine.

⁶ See Michael A. G. Haykin, “The Christian Life in the Thought of George Whitefield,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2014).

⁷ For a helpful introduction to the biblical and theological foundation for connecting the passive and active obedience of Christ, see Brandon Crowe, “The Passive and Active Obedience of Christ: Retrieving a Biblical Distinction,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 441–68.

Jesus Christ has accomplished this through his personal righteousness in regard to the law so that, as Whitefield concludes in a sermon, “By having Christ’s righteousness imputed to [believers], they are dead to the law, as a covenant of works.”⁸

A final note concerning Whitefield’s view of the atonement regards God’s need for *satisfaction* on account of his just wrath against humanity’s sin. The reliance upon federal (or covenantal) theology abounds in Whitefield’s sermons and helps us understand the heavy reliance on a satisfaction theme in the construction of his doctrine of the atonement. One example of this comes in a sermon entitled, *Of Justification by Christ* (1738).⁹ There, the need for justification is squarely set forward “on account of the sin of our natures. For we are all chargeable with original sin, or the sin of our first parents Adam’s sin was imputed to all.”¹⁰ Because of the sin of humanity’s “head” in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-7), “every person born into this world [as offspring of Adam] . . . deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.”¹¹ Whitefield identifies the problem most clearly when he says, “If God be true, unless there be some way found out to *satisfy divine justice*, we must perish.”¹² This emphasis in Christ’s death highlights the justice of God and the need for sacrifice on account of an inherently sinful people. It also highlights the universal scope of need in humanity for an atoning sacrifice for sin under a new “head.” By virtue of Christ’s resurrection, Whitefield contended that the death of Christ was indeed satisfactory in the sight of God and pleasing to him. In the resurrection, Christians are assured that Christ “hath made a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice,

⁸ George Whitefield, *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, ed. Lee Gatiss, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 239–49.

⁹ Whitefield, *Sermons*, 2:217.

¹⁰ Whitefield, *Sermons*, 2:242.

¹¹ Whitefield, *Sermons*, 2:242. Here, Whitefield is simply citing Article IX of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662).

¹² Whitefield, *Sermons* 2:45. Emphasis mine.

oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the world.”¹³ So, in the work of Christ, sinners have a new legal representative in their case before God and “those for whom Christ died and whose representative he is, shall have his merits imputed to them also [Rom 5:15].”¹⁴

In sum, George Whitefield believed in the vicarious satisfaction and fulfillment of Christ’s atonement for the elect of God. He puts it succinctly, “In this body [of Christ] He performed a complete obedience to the law of God; whereby He in our stead fulfilled the covenant of works, and at last became subject to death, even the death upon the Cross: that *as God He might satisfy, as man He might obey and suffer*; and being God and man in one person, might once more procure a union between God and our souls.”¹⁵ The legal dimensions of George Whitefield’s understanding of Christ’s work serve to highlight some of the differentiating aspects in John Wesley’s view.

John Wesley

Though a rival of George Whitefield on the issue of predestination and election, John Wesley was once a founding member of the Oxford “holy club” with Whitefield in the early days of what would later become known as the Methodist movement. Wesley was a strong leader in his espousal of Christianity during the revivals of the long eighteenth century, which centered on generosity to the poor, religious piety,

¹³ Whitefield, *Sermons*, 2:328. This is from his sermon entitled, “The Power of Christ’s Resurrection” (1739).

¹⁴ Whitefield, *Sermons* 2:247. It is interesting to note here that this quote comes in a section of the sermon which appears to be a later, clarifying disclaimer to ward off those who held to a universal (or unlimited) atonement. Commenting on the representative language of Adam and Christ for *all men* in Romans 5:18, Whitefield states, “I say all sorts of men, for the Apostle in this chapter is only drawing a parallel between the first and second Adam in this respect, that they acted both as representatives.... Whoever runs the parallel further, in order to prove universal redemption, whatever arguments they may draw for the proof of it from other passages of scripture, if they would draw one from this for that purpose, I think they stretch their line of interpretation beyond the limits of scripture.”

¹⁵ Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, 5:39, quoted in Jeongmo Yoo, “George Whitefield’s Doctrine of Christ,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (2014): 59.

and compassion shown toward the lonely, widowed, and imprisoned.¹⁶ His love for all people was a direct overflow of his view of the extent of Christ's atonement, which we will consider now.

As hinted at earlier, for *whom* Christ died was perhaps the most prominent and contentious issue in the debates surrounding the atonement. In his 1752 treatise, *Predestination Calmly Considered*, Wesley trumpeted the glaring problems Calvinists must face when reading the Bible and insisting on a "limited" redemption:

Show me the scriptures wherein God declares in equally express terms, (1.) "Christ" did not die "for all," but for some only. (2.) Christ is not "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world;" and, (3.) "He" did not die "for all," at least, not with that intent, "that they should live unto him who died for them." Show me, I say, the scriptures that affirm these three things in equally express terms.¹⁷

It seems as if the underlying concern for Wesley and Whitefield when considering the scope of Christ's atonement was either a fidelity to literal, scriptural interpretation, or logical, theological conclusions. Wesley saw the use of "all" or "every" in the relevant biblical passages portraying a sacrifice that has true significance for all people everywhere at all times (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:3-4; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 2:2). While, Whitefield's doctrine of a limited atonement did not hinder him in any way from offering the sacrifice of Christ to all people, Wesley was consciously aware of this divergence in theology. His brother, Charles, the famous hymn writer, expressed the (polemical and) Wesleyan view of those who held to a definite atonement in his poem, "The Horrible Decree":

They think Thee not sincere
In giving each his day:
'Thou only drawst the sinner near,

¹⁶ For a brief introduction to Wesley's life and ministry, see Kenneth J. Collins, "Wesley's Life and Ministry," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. John L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 43–59.

¹⁷ John Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013), 13:282, quoted in Houston, "With Their Salvation He Will Be Fully Satisfied," 160.

To cast him quite away;
To aggravate his sin,
His sure damnation seal,
Thou show'st him heaven,
and say'st Go in
And thrusts him into hell.

O HORRIBLE DECREE
Worthy of whence it came!
Forgive their hellish blasphemy
Who charge it on the Lamb.¹⁸

The strong language in this poem is representative of what the Scottish minister Dugald Butler communicates about the ministry of John Wesley:

His teaching was founded more on the *Fatherhood* than the Sovereignty of God; more on the *paternal* than the mere governmental relation of God to all men. He was, in the days of “particular election” and “limited atonement” and “unalterable decrees,” an apostle of the *Fatherhood*, a preacher of God’s *love* to all men, and of Christ’s death as an atonement for all men.¹⁹

When one considers Wesley’s view of the nature of Christ’s atonement, the themes of Fatherhood, acceptance, and forgiveness rise to fore. Not surprisingly, given his take on the unlimited scope of the atonement, Wesley highlighted the love of God in the sacrifice of Christ and derided those who placed their focus squarely on God’s wrath. Though God certainly demonstrated his justice and his wrath against sin, the death of Christ on the cross was the quintessential display of God’s love for the world. Interestingly, Wesley does not seem to hint at Anselm’s theory of satisfaction, as Whitefield does, nor does he use language present in the Calvinism of John Owen regarding the Commercial theory of the atonement, where God’s honor must necessarily be restored to himself through the punishment of sin.²⁰ Instead, the loving Fatherhood of

¹⁸ James G. Gordon, “‘Impassive He Suffers; Immortal He Dies’: Rhetoric and Polemic in Charles Wesley’s Portrayal of the Atonement,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18, no. 1 (2000): 56–70.

¹⁹ Dugald Butler, *John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland, Or, The Influence of the Oxford Methodists on Scottish Religion* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1899), 218. Emphasis mine.

²⁰ Darren Cushman Wood, “John Wesley’s Use of the Atonement,” *Asbury Journal* 62, no. 2 (2007): 58.

God served as a more compelling motive of accepting Christ's salvation in Wesley's ministry.

However, this focus on the love of God in Christ's death as the means of acceptance and forgiveness did not betray Wesley's belief in the prevailing view of a penal substitutionary atonement. Combined with imagery of victory over Satan, Wesley stated in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* on Colossians 1:14, "The voluntary passion of our Lord *appeased the Father's wrath*, obtained pardon and acceptance for us, and, consequently, dissolved the dominion and power which Satan had over us through our sins."²¹ Rather than focusing on a cosmological victory, the atonement of Christ was "the meritorious cause of justification" for the individual believer.²² Because of what Christ has done in his life, death, and resurrection, Wesley believed this procured "the peace of God, a 'peace that passeth all understanding,' and a 'rejoicing in hope of the glory of God' 'with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'"²³

Conclusion

While a brief survey of George Whitefield and John Wesley's view of the atonement cannot adequately paint a full portrait of the state of the debate during Sandeman's time, it will provide a helpful launching point for considering the work of Sandeman in greater depth as we seek to see how he viewed both the central themes of the atonement in Scripture, for whom Christ died, and how this impacts the way we ought

²¹ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986) quoted in Wood, "Wesley's Use of the Atonement," 57. Emphasis mine.

²² The use of the phrase, "meritorious cause," is not unique to Wesley, but has been one picked up frequently by others during his time and before. When discerning the cause of a Christian's resurrection, Thomas Aquinas concludes that the Passion of Christ is the "meritorious cause" of his and future Christians' resurrections. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washburne, 1914) III, q. 51, a. 1–2 (pp. 418–24).

²³ John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley: With the Last Corrections of the Author*, vol. 6 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1878), 45.

to communicate the message of the gospel and salvation to others. In the following section, we will see how Sandeman interacted with the key points of the atonement controversy as elucidated by Whitefield and Wesley to understand precisely what made Sandeman's position unique and disputed among the popular evangelicals of his day.

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT IN ROBERT SANDEMAN'S WRITINGS

A comment toward the beginning of Sandeman's *Letters* will provide a framework for us to consider his understanding of the nature of Christ's atonement. After quoting a troubling passage from Hervey's *Theron and Aspasio*, Sandeman begins to identify the type of pastor or theologian he is writing against. In the negative, he states, "I speak not of those who have employed their weapons against the person and work of Christ, endeavouring to make us lose sight of him as a *divine person*, and of his acting as the *substitute* and *representative* of sinners in *the whole of his obedience* unto death; . . . but I speak of those teachers, who . . . zealously maintained the scriptural doctrine concerning the person and work of Christ."¹ Thus, Sandeman writes not in contradiction to those he considers errant on the nature of Christ's atonement, but those who are wholly sound (in his estimation) of the doctrine. The areas he mentions in the quote are the critical themes of the nature of the atonement during this time: The divinity of Jesus, penal substitution, federal theology, and the obedience of Christ. What follows will be structured according to these four major themes.

The Divinity of Christ.

In Letter IV, Sandeman pauses his commentary on Hervey's work to consider "the spirit which breathes in the religions of the present age, more especially on the

¹ Robert Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio: Addressed to the Author*, 4th ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1838), 7.

leading point of acceptance with God.”² One of the individuals he centers on is John Hutchinson, a little known English writer who made many eclectic and controversial claims, like denying Newton’s theory of gravitation and insisting on the un-pointed reading of the Hebrew Bible to unveil the rational philosophical system that lied behind it. In the *Letters*, Sandeman is chiefly concerned with Hutchinson’s view of the divinity of Jesus, which represented a more popular, wide-spread belief, which we would call Kenosis, or the emptying of Jesus’s divinity during his earthly ministry according the an interpretation of Philippians 2:6–7. Sandeman quotes him as saying, “God, the second person, was named *Glory*, had by covenant laid down that glory, till he had performed his part, which that was not consistent with here, and was then to reassume it.”³ In this way, Sandeman says Hutchinson is “not content with yielding up the apostolic account of Christ as a Divine person” and stands in condemnation according to his very words: “Those who expect to be saved by a creature, or a dependent being, have showed themselves illiterate, so ignorant, so proud, so malicious.”⁴

It is quite clear, then, that the Sandemanian understanding of Jesus’s work in the stead of sinners necessarily hinges upon the full divinity *and* full humanity of Christ. If one were to elucidate on the beauties and benefits of the atonement, yet maintain such a denial of Jesus Christ as God, “all his swelling words about the atonement vanish into smoke, while he presents us only with the obedience of a human person.”⁵ If Jesus is not the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the redemption of humanity is gone, for a perfect, human sacrifice is required for the sin of man. Maintaining that Jesus is one Person with two natures (divine and human) is essential for tracing a line of

² Sandeman, *Letters*, 214–15.

³ Sandeman, *Letters*, 223.

⁴ Sandeman, *Letters*, 224.

⁵ Sandeman, *Letters*, 224.

salvation to those who trust in him. For Jesus “partook of [flesh and blood], that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb 2:14–15). Sandeman reminds his readers, via a letter from a friend, that we must not “abstract the Divinity of Christ’s person from his human nature, and from his office, so as to have no idea of him as man, or as representing either his Father to us or us to him.”⁶

Penal Substitution

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities.
The chastisement of our peace was upon him;
And with his stripes we are healed. (Isa 53:5; KJV)

The emphasis on penal substitution in the event of Christ’s death on the cross has a long history in the life and teaching of the Church.⁷ Therefore, it is no surprise to find Robert Sandeman using themes of this model of the atonement in his own explanation of the cross of Christ. The penal-substitutionary view of the atonement holds that Jesus Christ bore the divine wrath of God against sinners by taking their place on the cross. Two key elements of this position centered on the just penalty of sin (death) and Jesus as the substitute for sinners.

Paul reminds the Roman Church that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Since the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, humanity has dealt with the crushing reality that their personal and inherited sin nature is the reason we experience death in this life. Death is the just penalty of sin, handed down by God as a result of our rebellion toward him. Penal substitution holds that Christ himself took on human flesh

⁶ Sandeman, *Letters*, 482. This quote is from a letter Sandeman received on May 10, 1762, concerning the widespread abuse of Jesus’s quotation of Psalm 22:1 when hanging on the cross as a display of his being “disjoined” from the Father’s divinity.

⁷ For a brief history of key pastors and theologians who emphasized the penal-substitutionary nature of the atonement, see Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Recovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 161–203.

and bore the wrath of God in the stead of sinners as an atoning sacrifice for their sin, accomplishing salvation for those who would believe in him. More specifically, Christ was *punished* on behalf of sinful humanity. This specific assertion on the atonement as punishment have raised a myriad of counterarguments. One that Sandeman responded to in his *Letters* was from an Anglican theologian named Arthur Ashley Sykes. Quoting Dr. Sykes, the particular challenge against Christ's "punishment" was that

punishment for sin is certainly a proper method of deterring men from sin. But where is Christ ever said to be *punished*? where is he said to suffer *vicarious punishment*? Now, if Christ be never said to be *punished*, or to be *punished for others*; that doctrine can never be said to be a Scripture doctrine, which is not to be expressed in Scripture words. All that is here contended for, is, that the Scriptures never say that God inflicted punishment, or even *sufferings* on Christ, in order to, or with a view of deterring men from sin And, perhaps, the direct contrary to what is usually inferred, may with equal justice be *inferred*, viz. that God's *punishing an innocent* person, implies his displeasure with *innocency* [sic], or else that he acts *arbitrarily*, without regard to either right or wrong.⁸

The two issues Sykes raises deal with the biblical presentation of God *punishing* Jesus for the sins of others and the difficulty in understanding how an *innocent* person can rightly be punished for sin. While Sandeman does not answer these queries with scriptural proof (a common failure on his part), he does respond in such a way to defend what Sykes calls "vicarious punishment." Sandeman points to the mystery of the cross as the intersection of two paradoxical perfections. The death of Christ is "a very *strange* and *uncommon* event." It is "the perfection of justice and the perfection of mercy shining together; and instead of impairing or darkening, illustrating one another."⁹ Responding to this confusion as to the Father's disposal of punishment against the Son, Sandeman uses language similar to the apostle Paul's in Romans 9, saying, "*Have you a right—!* They can think of the Most High as obliged with them to love his neighbor as himself!"¹⁰ For

⁸ Sandeman, *Letters*, 325–26. Emphasis original.

⁹ Sandeman, *Letters*, 326.

¹⁰ Sandeman, *Letters*, 324.

Sandeman, the atonement necessarily involves the bearing of sin's punishment in the place of sinners. And since this is what has happened in the gospel of Jesus, one must square themselves with this reality, despite its difficulty to comprehend fully.

Another significant aspect of the penal substitution view centers on the nature of the one being sacrificed. Sandeman firmly believed that Christ functioned as an atoning and *perfect* substitute for humanity, both in his nature as the divine Son and in his life free from sin. In the introduction on his letter, *Some Thoughts on Christianity*, Sandeman begins by writing his friend about who precisely Jesus was and how his interaction with the religious leaders of his day confirmed this self-understanding of Jesus. Sandeman states,

It was no part of the dispute, whether Jesus, in calling himself the SON OF GOD, signified himself to be truly and properly God. All parties concerned, friends and foes, were agreed upon this: For under this title Jesus claimed equal honour with the Father; under this title the believing Jews worshiped him, and ascribed the divine perfections unto him, even at a time when nothing was more zealously maintained among the Jews, than the worshiping of one God only. Upon his assuming this title, the unbelieving Jews accused him of blasphemy; because, said they, he being a man, maketh himself God: and in another place, because he said, that God was his Father, making himself equal with God; while at the same time, however much they lay at the catch with his words, they never charged him with preaching up more gods than one.¹¹

In highlighting the divinity of Christ, Sandeman goes on to make the connection to its centrality in the resurrection of Jesus and the assurance of the believer's justification before God. Because Jesus was perfect, without sin in every way, and was thus raised from the grave, the Christian "is persuaded that God is already well pleased in his beloved Son; that every thing needful to recommend him to the divine favour, was

¹¹ Robert Sandeman, *Some Thoughts on Christianity. In a Letter to a Friend. By Mr. Sandeman, Author of the Letters on Theron and Aspasio; To Which Is Annexed by Way of Illustration, The Conversion of Jonathan the Jew, as Related by Himself.* (1764; repr., Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011), 4.

completed [*sic*] by Jesus on the cross, when he said, *It is finished*, and gave up the ghost.”¹²

Sandeman criticized the popular preachers for neglecting to emphasize the finished work of the atonement. He considered their pressure for individuals to strive and strain toward faith as antithetical to the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus. If the popular doctrine is correct, Sandeman says we have a gospel that presents “to us a God *almost* placated, and requiring something of us to make him *fully so*; yet very ready to help us out with that something, provided we set about it in good earnest. Or, to vary the expression, we look on God as become *fully well pleased*, though the atonement, *to assist* our feeblest effort to attain the qualifications necessary to gain his favour.”¹³

Covenant

Much like the federal/covenantal theological bent of George Whitefield, Robert Sandeman very much viewed the atonement through a similar lens. For such a prevailing theological system in the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that Sandeman would fall in line with this type of thinking, even though it brought him to alternative theological conclusions and ecclesiological practices.

According to Sandeman, the law given by Moses “ministered condemnation” and “demanded” righteousness.¹⁴ This covenant, though, was not the final one given by God, but over time revealed itself to be a typical one which was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. While the law given by Moses promised a “royal grant of life through righteousness,” the New Covenant “was ratified by the blood of Christ when he died as a sacrifice for sin” of

¹² Sandeman, *Some Thoughts on Christianity*, 6.

¹³ Joseph Browne, ed., *The Beauties of Palaemon: Consisting of Extracts from the Letters, Which Were Addressed Under That Name, to the Author of the Dialogues Between Theron and Aspasio; and Exhibiting in a Compendious Form, the Views of Divine Truth Maintained in the Former Work. Selected and Arranged by J. Browne* (Dublin: R. Napper, 1818), 44.

¹⁴ Sandeman, *Letters*, 108.

the church (cf. Rom 8:2). More explicitly, in responding to Hervey's character Aspasio, who states that "Christ performed whatever was required by the covenant of works," Sandeman says, "I have no concern with the distinction betwixt the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, on which our systems are formed."¹⁵ Sandeman is then aligning himself with the paradigm of federal theology during this time by saying Christ fulfilled the covenant of works and its obligations (obedience) and penalty (death). Thomas Boston, with whom Sandeman had no small contention, in his annotations on *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, both illustrates how similar their views of the covenantal fulfillment of Christ's atonement is and presents a more robust explanation than Sandeman himself. He writes,

Our Lord Jesus Christ became surety for the elect in the second covenant, Heb. viii. 22; and in virtue of that suretyship, whereby he put himself in the room of the principal debtors, he came under the same covenant of works as Adam did; in so far as the fulfilling of that covenant in their stead was the very condition required of him as the second Adam in the second covenant. Gal. iv. 4, 5, "God sent forth his Son—made under the law to redeem them that were under the law." Thus Christ put his neck under the yoke of the law as the covenant of works, to redeem them who were under it as such. Hence he is said to be the "end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. x. 4; namely the end for consummation, or perfect fulfilling of it by his obedience and death, which presupposeth his coming under it How then is the second covenant a covenant of grace? In respect of Christ, it was most properly and strictly a covenant of works, in that he made a proper, real, and full satisfaction in behalf of the elect; in respect of them, it is purely a covenant of the richest grace, in as much as God accepted the satisfaction from a surety, which he might have demanded of them; provided the surety himself, and gives all to them freely for his sake.¹⁶

It becomes clear in Sandeman's writing why he can hold to the same "system" as the popular preachers, like Boston, yet be so disgruntled with them at the same time. He reasons from the previous comment to Aspasio that the popular preachers (ironically, those who esteem *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*) muddy the distinction between the

¹⁵ Sandeman, *Letters*, 302–3.

¹⁶ Thomas Boston, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* in *The Complete Works of the Late Reverend Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M'Millan, vol. 7 (London: William Tegg, 1853), 185, quoted in William VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition: Atonement, Saving Faith, and the Gospel Offer in Scotland (1718-1799)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 80.

covenants and so cast aside the scriptural distinctions. What he is saying is that the popular preachers seem to be carrying over the fulfillment motif of the covenant of works and applying them the atonement so closely that the distinction between the two covenants are lost. For instance, Hervey writes in his dialogue between Aspasio and Theron, “*Asp. We are, I grant it, justified by works. But whose? The works of Christ, not our own. This is very far from contradicting ourselves.*”¹⁷ Sandeman disagrees with this conclusion from Hervey, saying by this “we are led to do so many things, which we are taught to consider as of a dubious or middle nature betwixt *works* or *no works*.”¹⁸ To him, such a close association with the covenant of works, even while being under the covenant of grace, is evidence of the popular preachers’ desire to keep their congregations and audiences under a yoke of slavery, hoping to “set aside the sovereignty of Divine grace, and lead us deceitfully to establish our own righteousness.”¹⁹

While it seems unfair for Sandeman to make these accusations, and these accusations probably are *not* made in good faith, they point to the underlying concern Sandeman had with the cultural moment he found himself in. Being suspicious of any mention of works as relevant in the age of the apostles and beyond, Sandeman shot down any attempts to maintain a relevancy for what Christ had done away with in his death and resurrection, that is, the law requiring the sacrifice of bulls and goats.

The Obedience of Christ

One mistake that is easy to make when discussing the atoning work of Christ is to focus singularly on the suffering of Christ in the final hours leading to his final breath (see Matt 26:57ff). Many of the revivalists and theologians of the eighteenth century,

¹⁷ James Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio, or, A Series of Dialogues and Letters, Upon the Most Important and Interesting Subjects* (London: Printed for Thomas Kelly, 1824), 1:368.

¹⁸ Sandeman, *Letters*, 302.

¹⁹ Sandeman, *Letters*, 302.

however, did not neglect to comment on the vicarious nature of Christ's obedience during the years leading to his death on the cross. In a sermon entitled "The Necessity and Profitableness of Good Works Asserted," Ebenezer Erskine said, "You know the title to life and glory was forfeited by the breach of the law in the first Adam; and it must be recovered again by a perfect obedience unto the law: and whose obedience can do this by the obedience of Christ imputed to us for righteousness?"²⁰ James Hervey wrote in response to John Wesley, "Are we notorious transgressors in ourselves? The consciousness of this is the strongest motive to humility.—Have we sinless obedience in CHRIST? The belief of this is an abundant source of joy."²¹ In a clear expression of his covenantal understanding of the atonement, James Hogg writes,

The Lord Jesus in the conquest of souls, unto himself, taketh as it were the Law, or the Covenant of Works in the one Hand, and carrieth it to all the Ends for which it is destined in this our fallen estate Hence I represent, that the same Lord Jesus, who is a Prince, and a Saviour exalted to give repentance, & remission of sins, the Lord Jesus I say in subduing sinners to himself is pleased to take the gospel (shall I so express it) in the other Hand: and is it wholly centers in himself, so that he thereby manifesteth in himself who only is the Lord, our Righteousness, and also our Sanctification. Here the two, viz. the Law and Gospel do most harmoniously agree.²²

In short, Christ's obedience in his death *and life* was a doctrine highly valued during the time of Sandeman's writing, as it emphasized the need for Jesus to be fulfillment and end of the Law leading to the new covenant. This emphasis was one often

²⁰ Ebenezer Erskine, *The Whole Works of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine: Consisting of Sermons and Discourses on Important and Interesting Subjects; to Which Is Added, an Enlarged Memoir of the Author*, vol. 1 (London: William Baynes and Son, 1826), 136–37.

²¹ James Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated, And the Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness Defended, In Eleven Letters From Mr. Hervey To Mr. John Wesley, In Answer To That Gentleman's Remarks on Theron And Aspasio. With Mr. Wesley's Letter Prefixed. To Which Is Annexed, A Defence of Theron And Aspasio, Against the Objections Contained In Mr. Sandeman's Letters On Theron And Aspasio. With Mr. Hervey's Letters to The Author Prefixed* (Glasgow: Printed by J. and M. Robertson, 1792), 197.

²² James Hog, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of Grace from the Charge of Antinomianism: Contained in a Letter to a Minister of the Gospel* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Brown, 1718), 13, quoted in VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition*, 70.

used by Robert Sandeman, especially in his attacks against those who insisted upon a view of faith that required laborious effort to believe in the gospel. In an essay written to a young minister, Sandeman writes as if he were a “preacher of Paul’s gospel” to a “parish, where the great majority have a devout character, under the care of a zealous minister.” In this parish, a great distinction has been made between the Law and the Gospel, such to the effect that “the gospel-command to believe [has become] some very exalted refinement of the law of works, calling you, after you have been disappointed in all your endeavours to help yourselves, by doing in every other shape, now to bestir yourselves to perform some notable act of a very spiritual nature, called *believing*.”²³ With this illustrative setting in mind, Sandeman notes the need for this young minister to effectively set forth the obedience of Christ to the law of Moses in his earthly ministry (leading to his death) as the foundation for assuring believers of the satisfied demands of the law and for the easing of their consciences:

Let us then set aside the deceitful ways of handling the distinction between the law and the gospel, and observe how it is illustrated in the Scripture. And where can we better look for a proper illustration of it, than to the dying words of the Lord and Saviour? who just before he bowed the head, and gave up the ghost, said, *It is finished*, or, *It is done*. Moses in his law said, *Do*; and while he mentioned the things required, said, *The man that doth them shall live in them*. No such man appeared, till Jesus came as the end of the law, and at the close of his work said, *It is done*. Thus, as the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ: for Moses said, *Do*; and Jesus says, *It is done*; and this is the great point proved by his resurrection.²⁴

Sandeman and most of his contemporaries believed in both the active and passive obedience of Christ as being imputed to the Christian. John Murray (1898-1975) explains this distinction well: “Christ as the vicar of his people came under the curse and condemnation due to sin and he also fulfilled the law of God in all its positive requirements He perfectly met both the penal and the preceptive requirements of

²³ Sandeman, *An Essay on Preaching*, 10.

²⁴ Sandeman, *An Essay on Preaching*, 11.

God's law. The passive obedience refers to the former and the active obedience to the latter."²⁵ In a critique of Theron in his *Letters*, Sandeman makes the distinction between the passive obedience (suffering) of Christ and the active obedience of Christ. While Theron asserted that he had no righteousness of his own except that belonging to Christ, Sandeman identifies the hypocrisy of Hervey and other popular preachers who, though "divested of *righteousness of his own*, of every *qualification and recommendation*, he must yet be well provided with *requisites*, even such as may embolden him to make the *appropriation*, which is declared to be essential to faith."²⁶ Sandeman was particularly perplexed that Hervey could hold to the comprehensive obedience of Christ in his active fulfillment of the law and his submission to suffering in the whole of his human existence, yet persisted in his "anxiety" requisite for saving faith, exemplified when Theron states, "My soul is in jeopardy," even after many reasonings that the work of Christ has been finished.²⁷

Conclusion

Based on several excerpts for Robert Sandeman's writings, it has been seen that he held considerably indistinct views on the nature of Christ's atonement according to the categories considered above with his contemporaries. In each case, Sandeman's contention has been on a seemingly inconsistent application of such views by figures such as Whitefield, Hervey, Boston, Hogg, and the like. In the following chapter on Sandeman's view of the extent of Christ's atonement, we will see that the same

²⁵ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 22.

²⁶ Sandeman, *Letters*, 245.

²⁷ Sandeman, *Letters*, 246. Theron makes many other statements of disbelief in his dialogue with Aspasio. "How fearful is the artillery of heaven!"; "Pardon me, Aspasio, for reiterating the question: I am really, with respect to the obedience of faith, too much like that Saxon monarch, who, for his unreadiness and remissness and inactivity, was surnamed The unready."; "O that I may arise, and with the divine assistance, shake off this stupor of unbelief! Certainly I can never be honorable to God, nor pleasing to Christ, nor profitable to ourselves." See James Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio*, 2:383, 387–88.

contention holds, especially as it relates to his disagreement on the free offer of the gospel.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT IN ROBERT SANDEMAN'S WRITINGS

The Marrow, The Brethren, and the Atonement

It is clear that many of Robert Sandeman's opponents were staunch advocates of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645), a work which caused no small flurry of pamphlets and books centered on the atonement, saving faith, and the gospel offer in Scotland during the early- to mid-eighteenth century.¹ The book by "E. F." was especially strong on its free offer of the gospel according to the purpose of Christ's atoning work on the cross. In *The Marrow*, the author writes, "Go and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven That is, go and tell every man *without exception*, that here is good news for him, Christ is dead *for him*, and if he will take him and accept of his righteousness, he shall have it."² As has been evidenced, Sandeman and many other secession and Assembly preachers and theologians were somewhat uniform in their approach to understanding what the atonement of Christ *was*. As it relates to *who* the atonement is for, though, there begins to rise a chasm between Sandeman on one hand and the popular preachers on the other hand. The Marrow brethren, who supported the publication of E. F.'s *Marrow* and included figures such as Ebenezer Erskins and Thomas Boston were the foil against which Sandeman directed many of his writings. He also took

¹ For an introduction and brief synopsis of the theology and impact of "*The Marrow* controversy," see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance: Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

² E. F., *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (London: Printed by R. W. for G. Calvert, 1645), 1, quoted in William VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition: Atonement, Saving Faith, and the Gospel Offerin Scotland (1718-1799)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 11.

time to address his contentions with the *Marrow* itself, which he relentlessly dubbed one of the popular doctrine's "most refined systems."³

Ebenezer Erskine preached a sermon at Strathmiglo, Scotland, in 1724 entitled *Christ in the Believer's Arms*.⁴ In this sermon centered on the acts of "holding" Christ, as Simeon did when Jesus was an infant, Erskine talks about the offer of Christ for all mankind. He says, "Christ is offered particularly to every man; there is not a soul hearing me, but, in God's name, I offer Christ unto him as if called by name and surname [*sic*]." He goes on, "A general persuasion of the mercy of God in Christ, and of Christ's ability and willingness to save all that come to him, will not do the business: no; devils and reprobates may, and do actually believe it. There must, therefore, of necessity be a persuasion and belief of this, with particular application thereof unto a man's own soul."⁵ While this quote seems to address the issue of genuine, saving faith, the assurance that follows, and the legitimacy of "offering" Christ to any who will listen, Erskine is really revealing his fundamental belief about Christ's atonement, as Sandeman contests. Rather than a "general persuasion," Erskine is saying a persuasion of the truth that applies to one's heart is requisite to be saved by God. Sandeman, on the other hand, points to Paul's command to the Corinthian believers to "examine themselves, whether they were in the faith," though Paul himself had looked upon these individuals as true Christians (1 Cor 11:28). The presence of doubt in a believer's life should not be reason to abandon their confidence in the sufficiency of Christ's atonement. Instead, when prompted to waver due to temptation or doubt, Sandeman challenges the believer to be conscious of the fact that faith in Christ's atonement "is the spring of life, by its supporting them in all those

³ Robert Sandeman, *Letters on Theron and Aspasio: Addressed to the Author*, 4th ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1838), 304.

⁴ Ebenezer Erskine, "Christ in the Believer's Arms," *Reformed Perspectives* 15, no. 3 (2013).

⁵ Sandeman, *Letters*, 285. Erskine here serves as a precursor to a more robust defense of affectionate faith set forth by Andrew Fuller in the late eighteenth century.

circumstances wherein their hearts behoved otherwise to die within them.”⁶ Since the earliest Christians “went forward unto the full assurance of hope unto the end,” they were able to know without a doubt that “Christ in his *death* loved them, and *gave himself for them.*”⁷ Here, Sandeman shows that those whom Christ died for can only be knowingly assured of their *particular* salvation through their continuing in the word (John 8:31).

Thomas Boston wrote on the need and purpose for the free offer of the gospel in his *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (1720). Refuting Boston’s defense of the universality of the gospel offer, Sandeman cites a “troubling” quotation from *Human Nature* when Boston writes,

[Objection 2:] *Why do you, then, preach Christ to us; call us to come to him, to believe, repent, and use the means of salvation?* [Answer:] Because it is your duty so to do. It is your duty to accept of Christ as he is offered in the gospel; to repent of your sins, and to be holy in all manner of conversation. These things are commanded you of God; and his command, not your ability, is the measure of your duty.⁸

The gospel is preached to all, without exception, because Christ’s death is for *all* without exception. Of course, Boston would say that the atonement is effectual for only the elect, but his desire to see all respond to the gospel impacted his view on preaching the gospel of Christ’s justifying death on the cross. Sandeman goes so far as to say this disconnect between doctrine and practice actually “makes the gospel subservient to human pride as its tool, or as a means for producing those exercises of soul wherein justifying faith is made to consist.”⁹

Not only did the Marrow Brethren receive Sandeman’s rebukes, but so did the *Marrow* itself. Interacting with Hervey’s *Theron and Aspasio*, Sandeman breaks from

⁶ Sandeman, *Letters*, 289.

⁷ Sandeman, *Letters*, 289. Emphasis mine.

⁸ Sandeman, *Letters*, 228.

⁹ Sandeman, *Letters*, 229.

this work and seamlessly quotes an excerpt from the *Marrow* in order to “produce a passage to the same purpose.”¹⁰ Theron in Hervey’s book is equivalent to Neophytus in the *Marrow*. These dialogue partners are desirous to take Christ as their own but are not persuaded that he is truly theirs. In sum, they doubt the particularity of Christ’s death *for them* and must find his assurance within their own hearts rather than the work of Christ. With confidence, Evangelista (the apparent equivalent to Aspasio) declares to his doubting friend, “As truly as the Lord liveth, he will not have thee die the death; but hath verily purposed, determined, and decreed, that thou shalt live with him forever.”¹¹ Sandeman evaluates this passage from the *Marrow* and concludes that the message of the book is no different than the message of the popular preachers of his day. He sees that “the ground of their acceptance with God, or first spring of good hope, is the very same with that of their antagonists, the fashionable preachers, to wit, the *pious resolve* we took notice of before. This is the key held forth on all hands, as powerful to open for men the gates of heaven, and shut those of hell.”¹² Sandeman then relates this to a misappropriation of the doctrine of Christ’s atonement, for the popular preachers and the message of the *Marrow* seem to place too high a price of the truth revealed in the *heart*, where the true gospel is manifest on the cross. While Theron and Neophytus desire God’s grace for salvation, they inappropriately seek “*the truth of grace in the heart*,” whereas Sandeman questions, “When our systems describe faith to us, as a saving grace bestowed on us, by which we make use of Christ for salvation, are we not led to think of some grace necessary to our salvation, beside what appeared when Christ, by the grace of God, *tasted death for the sins of men?*”¹³ Here, Sandeman locates the saving grace of God in

¹⁰ Sandeman, *Letters*, 306.

¹¹ Sandeman, *Letters*, 307.

¹² Sandeman, *Letters*, 308.

¹³ Sandeman, *Letters*, 309. Emphasis mine.

the death of Christ for sins of men. He thus disparages those who identify the elect of God and the objects of his atoning as those who seek saving grace in the power to believe, rather than in the cross. As was noted above by John Wesley, Sandeman was often accused of a hyper-focus on the cross of Christ as the sole means of God's grace toward sinners. This led to accusations of Sandeman as a deep-rooted antinomian and a Calvinist that was thoroughly and practically consistent with his view on the extent of Christ's atonement.

A Consistent Calvinist

Sandeman points out the contradiction between the Calvinism of the popular preachers and their stubborn affirmation and appropriation of the free offer of the gospel:

I find them, indeed, maintaining strongly, that in no sense Christ died for any but the elect; and yet at the same time affirming, as Aspasio's two friends have taught them, that Christ, by his taking on the human nature stands related to the whole human race; yea, roundly asserting, that he 'doth stand in an *equal* or *undistinguished* relation of a *Kinsman-Redeemer* to mankind-sinners, as such;¹⁴

Thus, Sandeman and the popular preachers would likely agree on the nature of Christ's atonement, yet the evangelistic zeal of the preachers broadened the scope of the sacrifice of Christ for the sake of winning some for Christ. Sandeman would thus conclude, in more modern terms, that the popular preachers claim to have held a penal-substitutionary theory of atonement, while operating their ministry under a moral theory of atonement. So while Sandeman and the popular preachers fundamentally agreed on the nature of Christ's atonement, their public ministries presented differing views, especially regarding the extent of the atonement. Peter Abelard, the promulgator of the moral influence theory, commented on Romans 3:19-26 and laid down the standard approach to viewing the atonement when he said that we are reconciled to God through the example

¹⁴ Sandeman, *Letters*, 27–28.

Christ set for us in his passion, “With the result that our hearts should be enkindled by such a gift of divine grace, and true charity should not now shrink from enduring anything for him.”¹⁵ According to Sandeman, men like George Whitefield and John Wesley were so zealous to see sinners come to Christ that they, while upholding the satisfaction of God’s wrath in Christ’s death, too highly emphasized the aim of Christ’s sufferings as the change of the human soul rather than the fulfillment of God’s plan and purpose for salvation.

As mentioned earlier, the Calvinist theory of a definite, or limited, atonement dominated among many of the popular preachers, save the Wesleyans. But Sandeman thought that men like Whitefield created an ocean between theory and practice. The definite nature of Christ’s atoning work on the cross, according to Sandeman, was in grave danger in the hands of the popular preachers. Listen to Theron’s recounting of Aspasio’s gospel-offer: “Aspasio urges me to fly, without any delay, to the covert of Christ’s meritorious obedience. This, he says, was wrought out in my name and in my stead: this will be admitted both at the throne of grace and the bar of judgment, as my justifying righteousness.”¹⁶ Essentially, Hervey is suggesting that the gospel offer can promise Christ’s atoning work was “wrought out” in the name of individuals who may or may not accept such an offer. There is no discrimination in the offer. Such a practice sullies the purpose of Christ’s atonement and weakens the reality of the universal sinfulness of all humanity. If humans are convinced that Christ died for all people indiscriminately, “the balance, in point of happiness, lay much in favour of unbelievers.” Pointedly, Sandeman implies the desire of the preachers for holding to a view of the atonement which is universal in scope is so that Christianity may have “a respectable

¹⁵ Peter Abelard, *Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 283.

¹⁶ Sandeman, *Letters*, 22.

appearance in high life.”¹⁷ While Sandeman does not explicitly detail his view here of whom Christ died for, it is obvious that his practice was aligned with his doctrine, such that we surmise that Christ died in any significant way only for the elect. He makes this assumption clear, though, in other parts of his writing.

A Peculiar Redeemer

Sandeman is clear in his limited view of the atonement when he states, “Jesus Christ, by the price of redemption, which he paid, delivers *his people* from the wrath to come, and he entitles them to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away.”¹⁸ In another place he writes, “The sufficiency of the future atonement revealed to *God’s chosen* of old, was the ground of their comfort and hope.”¹⁹ Describing the “promise” of salvation in Acts 2:38, Sandeman comments, “It may be said that the promise seems to belong to many who yet come short of it. But still it must be said, that the promise is only ‘unto as many as the Lord our God shall call [Rom 9:24].’”²⁰ At issue in all of these quotations is a disagreement with how the popular preachers view Christ’s connection with humanity in his own assumption of human nature and his connection with humanity through his death on the cross. They would say that the “for all” passages regarding the atonement (e.g., John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:12) represent Christ’s solidarity with humanity in the Incarnation, and thus his solidarity and offer of salvation through his atoning life, death, and resurrection to all humanity. But Sandeman’s response to such a

¹⁷ Sandeman, *Letters*, 24.

¹⁸ Sandeman, *Letters*, 27.

¹⁹ Joseph Browne, ed., *The Beauties of Palaemon: Consisting of Extracts from the Letters, Which Were Addressed Under That Name, to the Author of the Dialogues Between Theron and Aspasio; and Exhibiting in a Compendious Form, the Views of Divine Truth Maintained in the Former Work. Selected and Arranged by J. Browne* (Dublin: R. Napper, 1818), 252.

²⁰ Sandeman, *Letters*, 477–78. This section of Sandeman’s *Letters* is an appendix to the third edition and is in response to reviewers who critiqued earlier editions.

claim is pivotal in understanding his view of the extent of Christ's atonement and his consistency with a common Calvinist view on those for whom Christ died. His words are worth quoting at length:

These writers treat the Scriptures, speaking of God's gift and promise of eternal life, suitably enough to their notion of Christ's connection with the whole human race by his birth, and much in the same manner as the opposers of particular redemption do the universal expressions about the extent of Christ's death; but if we are desirous to hold the Scripture consistent with itself, we may easily observe, that Christ has his world, and that Satan has his world, yea, each his *whole world*, as we find in the second and fifth chapters of John's first epistle. So Christ has his *all men*, and antichrist has his *all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond*. And as antichrist has his all nations, so Christ has his nations of them that are saved. Now, to those who love the Scripture account of God's grace, Christ's peculiar connection with his people, in his birth, death, resurrection, &c., will appear to be very naturally set forth in such expressions as these: 1. As to his birth,—“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,—I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day a Saviour. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins. They shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us.” 2. His death and resurrection; “Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.” 3. Intercession; “who also maketh intercession for us. I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine. Neither pray I for these (*the apostles*) alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”

Sandeman identifies the problem with connecting the atoning work of Christ to the whole human race, regardless of being elect not, by citing multiple scripture passages refuting this popular doctrine.

With God's gift of the elect to his Son well corresponds his gift of his Son for them or to them. —“God so loved the world, that he gave his Son, that whosoever believeth, &c. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!”

The great blessings conveyed to men are said to be given both by the Father and the Son; so John vi, “Labour—for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you.—My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.—For the bread of God is he who cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.—The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Again, chap, x, “The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.—And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” And chap, xvii, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.—And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them.” So 1 John v, 11, “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life.”

These, and many such passages, clearly ascertain the peculiar and inseparable connection between Christ and his people, in his incarnation, and all that follows upon it; unless, disregarding the connection of the Scripture doctrine, we would play

fast and loose with the pronouns *you* and *us*, according to our own fancy. They also show, that all to whom God gives eternal life, are in reality, by his giving, put in possession of it. The Scripture affords no ground for that equivocal notion of giving, which confers no benefit, nor serves any purpose, except it be to lay a foundation for what is called the *ministerial offer*, and give some countenance to the little self seeking views of many preachers. Paul, speaking of the certain salvation of all the true Israel, adds, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance,” so can never prove ineffectual, through any defect in the hearer or receiver, because the unchangeable God, who gives and calls, will not repent.²¹

We can learn much from this excerpt about Sandeman’s view of the extent of the atonement and his discrepancies with the ministerial (“free”) offer of the gospel. First, he makes a distinction between the realms of God’s people and Satan’s people. In light of this, Sandeman is able to say that the “all people” passages in Scripture that relate to Christ’s atonement are addressing only the people of God since those to whom are given the gift of salvation are those who are actually “put in possession of it.” To give *without* actually giving possession is afforded no ground in Scripture, but is instead a ploy by the popular preachers to make much of their own ministry. And secondly, he treats the universal solidarity argument by saying the gift of Christ is given by the *Father* and the Son. Therefore, the atonement is more than Christ’s connection and offer for all humanity through the Incarnation, but it is a gift given *by* the Father and the Son to the elect. Since the Father gives, the atonement cannot simply be universal or unlimited based on identification, since it was not the *Father* who assumed a human nature. With arguments like these, Sandeman freely offers to all his take on whom Christ died for.

²¹ Sandeman, *Letters*, 475–77.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In John Wesley's response to Robert Sandeman's *Letters on Theron and Aspasio*, he certainly had no shortage of rebuttals for the arguments Sandeman made, specifically concerning the nature of saving faith. But one of his final objections was perhaps the most damning: "I object, Fourthly, That you have no Charity, and that you know not what Charity is."¹ David Wilson also examined in this work "such a spirit through the whole of that performance, as would make one suspect, that the author thereof has something else in view than to defend the pure doctrines of the gospel, which he would have us believe is the chief scope of his book."² Robert Riccaltoun closes his preface to a work responding to Sandeman's book with this condemnation:

To conclude, it may not be amiss to remark, That the letter-writer [Sandeman] has a peculiar dexterity in waving the points that press hard upon him; and turning the Reader's attention upon quirks or perversions of words, which never entered into the thoughts of those he means to condemn: and, after he has tortured their words into his own gloss, of posing [*sic*] them up as enemies to *the Truth*; while he would have it believed that he is its humblest friend.³

It likely has not been missed by the reader of this paper that Robert Sandeman lived up to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' description of him as a born controversialist. His works are peppered with quotations and excerpts of well-respected preachers and theologians of

¹ John Wesley, *A Sufficient Answer, to Letters to the Author of Theron and Aspasio; in a Letter to the Author [R. Sandeman]* (Bristol, England: E. Farley, 1757), 9.

² David Wilson, *Palæmon's Creed Reviewed and Examined*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for George Keith, 1762), 2.

³ Robert Riccaltoun, *An Inquiry Into the Spirit and Tendency of Letters on Theron and Aspasio. With a View of the Law of Nature, and an Inquiry Into Letters on the Law of Nature* (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour and Neill, 1762).

his time, yet he rarely has a kind word to say about them. But the focus of this present work has been to discern what Robert Sandeman believed about the atonement of Jesus Christ. Though many of his day said that he was uncharitable, uncompassionate, and an isolated nuisance, an attempt has been made to be objective and identify what he believed and *why*.

To summarize, for Sandeman we see in the death of Christ God expressing his divine displeasure against what the world deems righteousness (yet is an *abomination* in God's sight, that is, human pride). We see human guilt and misery revealed despite mankind's apparent state of peace. We see that the all-sufficient remedy for sin, guilt, and misery is concocted in the blood of Christ. This blood was brought from outside the camp into the holy place within,

So Christ, that by his blood he might
His people sanctify,
Loaded with guilt, without the gate
was led to groan and died.

Though his pure heart, when tempted much,
Ne'er lodged an impious thought;
Yet sov'reign grace the sins of all
His people on him brought.⁴

But as we have seen it is not so much that Sandeman believed the “wrong” things about what happened on the cross of Christ. It is that he let a tenacious and stubborn spirit lead him to reject any offer of the gift of salvation to non-believers in a personal way. What seems to have begun as a pastoral concern to protect individuals from over-zealous preachers of the free gospel leading them into spiritual anxiety turned out to be an obstinate practical theology. His writings and legacy are worth studying for the sake of seeing how adherence to commonly accepted doctrines, like the penal-substitutionary atonement theory, does not guarantee uniform ministerial practices. In

⁴ Robert Sandeman, *Letter From Mr. Robert Sandeman to Mrs. Jeffrey in England. To Which Are Added Four Christian Songs, By the Same Author* (Edinburgh: Printed by J. Schaw, 1819), 18.

short, orthodoxy does not cause orthopraxy, and in his case, he often committed ministerial malpractice.

Sandeman would later be known primarily for his controversial view of saving faith as a mental assent to the truth, devoid of love.⁵ But behind this controversial view was his belief that the atonement of Christ was sufficient for all God's people. Thus, any attempts to add to Christ's afflictions was abhorrent to Sandeman. So, let those of us who are comforted by a belief in classic Reformed soteriology, for instance, not think that we are above reproach as it relates to the finer details of our theological system. Likewise, we must also be wary of a tempestuous spirit dominating the truths we hold dearly. If it were not for Sandeman's unsavory candor, perhaps the movement he started would not have petered out so quickly. And if we are not careful, evangelical Christians could let a similar spirit of division tear down brothers and sisters who hold the common cause of seeing all people come to Christ.

⁵ His infamous doctrine has recently been brought to the attention of many evangelicals through the recent work of John Piper, *What Is Saving Faith? Reflections on Receiving Christ as a Treasure* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), where he addresses the topic of Sandemanianism in a chapter entitled, "If Saving Faith Is Affectional, Does It Merit Justification?," 47–55.

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ABSTRACT

“THEIR PECULIAR REDEEMER”: ROBERT SANDEMAN AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

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Robert Sandeman (1718–1771) was a Scottish minister who begat the Sandemanian movement that carried into the early nineteenth century. Though Sandeman is widely known for his controversial view on the nature of saving faith, his stance on the nature and extent of the atonement underpinned many of his theological and ecclesiological beliefs. This paper explores the history of Sandeman’s life, the discussion regarding atonement theories in the eighteenth century, and his own writings on the cross of Christ.

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