

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

THE FIRST BOOK BANNED IN BOSTON

The Founder of Springfield (named after his home town in England) was William Pynchon. There is an Episcopal Church building here that is a duplicate of his home parish church [Anglican- he was a Puritan] and a statue of him is next to the main City Library. In 1650, he wrote "The Meritorious Price of our Redemption" in which he .. condemned especially the doctrine that Christ suffered the wrath of God and the torments of hell to pay man's debt to his Creator. The Massachusetts General Council members [the Legislature] read the book, considered it to be heretical, and ordered it burned immediately on the Market Place at Boston. It was the first book "banned in Boston".

Mr Pynchon's heresy was in writing that Christ had not suffered the wrath of God, paying a painful price to atone for our sins. He particularly denied that Christ spent 3 days in Hell, suffering the fires there on our behalf (which the Apostles Creed implies). Mr Pynchon denied what John Calvin wrote about this and what has been accepted by many Calvinists as true-...it was expedient for [Christ] to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death. A little while ago we referred to the prophet's statement that "the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," "he was wounded for our transgressions" by the Father, "he was bruised for our infirmities" [Isaiah 53:5 p.]. By these words he means that Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge — submitting himself even as the accused — to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked! -from Calvin's Institutes To deny all this was considered heresy. Rather than recant, Mr Pynchon returned to England. He had tried to make the case that what Christ offered for our redemption was his perfect life, particularly his perfect obedience. Many Calvinists today agree with this "heresy", connecting it with the requirement of the Covenant. Christ fulfilled, by his life, what was impossible for us sinners to provide- perfect obedience and righteous- not just sinlessness [Calvinists who are not Reformed or Covenantalist will debate this.] Covenantal Calvinists connect Christ's righteousness and obedience with the Doctrine of Justification in which sinners are reckoned to have Christ's Righteousness. It is said to be "imputed" to them. Strange as it will sound to many evangelicals, this Doctrine is saying we are not saved by faith alone, rather we are saved by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to sinners when they come to Christ by faith alone. It is actually saying we are not saved by works, but we are saved by merit- the merit of Christ's perfect life and obedience reckoned to us when we come to faith. Salvation is not simply by faith. It is by being "in Christ", which faith makes possible. The forensic and positional nature of Salvation is not commonly understood today, being replaced by a subjective and pietistic understanding. Was Mr Pynchon of Springfield really a Heretic? Yes and No. That Christ suffered the Wrath of God is true and Scriptural. His death was a "propitiation" [here is an example, by the way, of why literal translations of Scripture are essential. Paraphrases do not use this word.] "Propitiation" is a technical word and means a sacrifice upon which God vents His Wrath. In dying, Christ became sin- for us. Thus, he experienced the anger God has against all the sin of the world. Christ's death was also an "expiation", meaning that it effectively removed the sin that made God angry. In denying this Doctrine, Mr Pynchon would be a heretic. However, he is not a heretic in denying that Christ suffered the pain of Hell on our behalf. Christ's sacrificial death was a complete and full Atonement. It did not require that Christ had to suffer additional torment in Hell. The phrase in the Apostles Creed saying Christ "descended into Hell" is very misleading and should be removed. Finally, Mr Pynchon is not a heretic in teaching that Christ offered His perfect obedience and righteousness to atone for our sins, as well as his blood (death) That is Scriptural. I'm sure that none of these Doctrines have been preached at Old First Church for a long, long time. The pity is that they are not preached in many churches today.

Posted by Cal in Theological Issues at 13:26

Are you saying God's wrath was expiated with only the physical punishment Jesus endured on the cross?

If the punishment for sin is separation from God, and Jesus took our punishment upon Himself, doesn't this mean He suffered separation from God (ie Hell)?

Anonymous on Nov 28 2007, 22:16