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THE ATONEMENT.

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THE ATONEMENT.

FOR IF, WHEN WE WERE ENEMIES, WE WERE RECONCILED TO GOD BY THE DEATH OF HIS SON, MUCH MORE, BEING RECONCILED, WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE; AND NOT ONLY SO, BUT WE ALSO JOY IN GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BY WHOM WE HAVE NOW RECEIVED THE ATONEMENT.—Romans v. 10, 11.

THE word which is translated *reconcile* in the tenth verse, is translated *atone* in the eleventh. Of course, therefore, the meaning is the same. The two words were used by the translators as exactly synonymous, and the word Atonement was printed in the first editions of the English Bible, At-one-ment. It is used in the same manner by other writers in the time of James I., so that its meaning is well established, and as this is the only passage in the New Testament where it occurs, we are authorized to say that the doctrine of Atonement and the doctrine of Reconciliation are the same thing. If we so regard it, this is the great doctrine of religion. It is the substance of religion itself. Other truths may be important, but they are so only as they are subsidiary to this. In a practical point of view, they concern us only as they teach us how to be reconciled to God, and help us in becoming so. Or, in other words, all religious truth is important in propor-

tion as it shows to sinners the way of salvation, and helps them to walk therein until salvation is attained.

The necessity of reconciliation rests upon the fact that we are sinners. "God made man upright, and he has sought out many inventions." "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." How this came to pass is not here the material question. The fact is undeniable, and from it comes the necessity of the Gospel redemption. If there is any man who has committed no sin, for him the mission of Christ has no personal interest. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," but where there has been no rebellion, there can be no reconciliation. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick"; and therefore Christ said, that "he came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." It is because we feel ourselves to be sinners, that we come to Christ. We have lost our way and desire to find it. We have rebelled against God and desire to make peace with him. We are alienated from him and desire to be again brought near. Our sins rise up in judgment against us, and we desire that the record of them should be blotted out. Through sin we are at enmity with God, and as his creatures, dependent on his power, as his children, whose only hope of happiness comes from the Father's love, our chief concern, I may say our only concern, is to find the means of reconciliation with him; to obtain assurance of pardon and acceptance with God, of whose love we have made ourselves so unworthy.

This is our inquiry to-night. Not an abstract subject of metaphysical research, but the great practical question of religion. How shall the burdened conscience throw off its load? Where shall the despairing heart, self-accused, find hope? Where shall the weary and heavy laden find

rest? Is it not a question which concerns us all? May God in his mercy guide us to a right answer! And that we may be so guided, let us consider it, not as a disputed subject in theology, but as a practical subject in vital religion.

How shall the sinner be reconciled with God? How shall he be *justified*, or restored to God's favor? How shall he obtain forgiveness and remission of sins? We look for an answer, — First, to the laws of God's government; to that which we call Nature, interpreted by our unenlightened reason. An answer comes, but it is not an answer of peace. It is not forgiveness, but "Pay me that thou owest." "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, *sin lieth at the door*." It is the voice of stern, un pitying exaction. "Everywhere in Nature we read Law, inexorable, unrelenting Law. She governs by laws, which indeed are always adapted to the good of the whole, to the advancement and perfection of the race, but beneath them the individual continually is crushed. Nature never pardons. Her wheels thunder along their iron track, nor turn out to spare any helpless mortal who has fallen beneath them. Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Helplessness is no exemption. There is no appeal to any court of error, but prompt execution follows judgment. The innocent child, who ignorantly touches fire, is not the less burned. The man who, in the night, ignorantly walks over a precipice, is not the less destroyed. In nature, therefore, we find no word of pardon for those who have broken the law, whatever may be their excuse or sorrow."* If the laws of God's moral government are equally stern and unbending, there is no

* Doctrine of Forgiveness, by James F. Clarke.

hope for man ; his sins will surely find him out, and sooner or later will work his destruction.

If we look to our own moral nature, the same answer comes, equally stern, equally un pitying. Perhaps I may say even more so. The wound upon the physical frame will be healed by the curative power of nature herself ; and although a scar is left, the injury may be forgotten. But the wounds of conscience are not healed ; sin once committed can never be forgotten. Or if for a time it be put out of mind by the hurried pursuits of life, it will still rise up again, like the ghost of a murdered friend, to spoil our best enjoyment and to rebuke us in our proudest imaginings. Conscience speaks no word of pardon ; it gives no assurance that God's favor will be restored to those by whom it has been once forfeited. Its rebuke is equally stern for a sin committed years ago as for those of yesterday. The intervening years may have been spent in the sorrow of repentance, or in works of obedience, but conscience remains unappeased. Perhaps the more nearly we come to a righteous life, the more deeply we feel the stings of remorse, for the iniquity of bygone days.

Such is the natural working of a tender conscience. It cannot find comfort for itself ; it cannot blot out the record of its own sins. It looks upward, but it clothes the Almighty in attributes of vengeance ; its own fears read anger in his face ; its own sense of ill-deserving anticipates the sentence of condemnation. It drives the sinner to cruel penances, to self-torture and scourging, vainly striving to expiate the sins of the soul by the sufferings of the body ; and yet, after years of such penance, the poor sufferer, at each renewed remembrance of his sin, will strike the bleeding scourge more deeply into the flesh and cast himself to the ground in renewed and hopeless agony. History

will tell of a thousand such, and this is the Voice of Pardon which the awakened conscience speaks.

Or sometimes it will deceive the sinner with the hope, that by offering payment to the Most High his debts may be discharged; and thus, by sacrifices upon the altar, or by the building of costly churches, or by the splendor of external worship, or, in more enlightened times, by institutions of charity and other works of philanthropy, men have sought to make their peace with Him against whose majesty they have rebelled. But still, however costly the sacrifice, the conscience cannot be thus satisfied. Still there has been a whispering, that it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin; or that God should be appeased by the imperfect offerings of those who, when they have done all, are but unprofitable servants.

There needed something more than this, some higher and better teaching. It is a necessity which every one of us, who acknowledges himself to be a sinner, must feel, and we shall feel it more and more deeply, in proportion as we rise higher in purity and goodness. We need to be assured that God is merciful. Reason itself may teach us that he is good towards those who do not violate his laws; for the provisions of nature are always bountiful and kind, both for man and beast, so long as they are not perverted by the selfishness or folly of those for whose good they were intended. But from the retributions of a violated law, reason alone finds no way of escape. From the anger of an offended God, reason alone points out no refuge. There is a debt which cannot be paid, and reason alone gives no assurance that God will remit it. This is what we need to learn, *that God is merciful*. This is the balm in Gilead, by which the wounded conscience can be made whole; this is the voice from heaven which we need

to hear, speaking peace to the broken and contrite heart. We need some assurance, that, "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The religion which can give us that assurance is the religion for which the sinful heart yearns. Let us but learn that there is forgiveness with God, that upon certain conditions, with which we are able to comply, he will not impute to men their past offences, but will *freely justify* them and graciously accept them, in the exercise of his infinite mercy, and it is all we need to know. The wall of separation between us and our God is then thrown down. The way for reconciliation, and for the redemption which follows it, is open. He who brings that assurance, who instructs us in these conditions, is indeed our Saviour. But if he not only does this, but gives us encouragement and help in complying with the conditions, and goes before in the way wherein we must walk, and disarms death of its terror, and reveals God to us as a Father clothed in the attributes of tenderness and love, and opens to our eyes the heavenly abode where God and his angels dwell, and to which he, the messenger of love, has gone before to prepare a place for us, that where he is we may be also ;— in what words can we express our gratitude, except to say, "Thanks be to God, for his unspeakable gift," in our Lord Jesus Christ. Such are the glad tidings of great joy, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." Whisperings of the same message had been spoken in the world before. To Abraham and to his children, to the righteous men and prophets of olden time, some intimations had been given of God's abounding love towards the sinner : "For I have no pleasure, saith the Lord God, in the death of the sinner, but rather that he should turn and live."

By such words many hearts had been comforted. The penitent sinner had been made to hear joy and gladness, and the bones which had been broken were made to rejoice. Nay, I believe that in all religions, even in those most obscured by superstition, there have always been some rays of divine truth, received through the first revelation which God made of himself to his human family, by which a stronger hope of God's mercy has been given than reason alone could suggest. The spirit of God has always striven with man; the light has always been in the world everywhere, and men have preferred darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. But when, through the manifold corruptions of sin and human error, the whole head had become sick and the whole heart faint, it became necessary that a clearer revelation of God's mercy should be made. And it was then, when the full time had come, that "God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved."

The Christian religion is throughout a revelation of mercy; even as we read, "Of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace." I do not mean that it annuls God's law; on the contrary, Christ came to fulfil, or to make perfect and complete, the moral law under which we live and by which we must be judged. The Christian law of morals is the strictest that has ever been given to man. It is the strictest that we can conceive. It takes hold, not only of the actions, but the motives from which action springs; of all our secret desires and thoughts and purposes. It holds before us the standard of absolute perfection, of which it gives an example in Jesus Christ, and commands us never to be weary of well-doing, until we have attained to the fulness of his stature. But for the past offences of the penitent sinner, and for his continued short-comings in the Christian race, it has words of blessed healing, of

heavenly comfort, of eternal encouragement. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous."

When we have learned with humility of heart to confess our sins, to acknowledge ourselves guilty before God, and that by the deeds of the law — by our own imperfect righteousness — no man can be justified in his sight, then do we also learn, that God is ready to *justify us*, to restore us again to his favor, if we come before him with believing, trustful hearts, seeking to do his will as followers of Christ. That he will justify us; not because we deserve it, for from such a claim every mouth is stopped, by the acknowledgment of sin. But that he will justify us freely, by his grace, his infinite mercy, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom he hath foreordained to be a mercy-seat for those who approach through faith in him, to declare that the sinner shall be justified — treated as though he were righteous, received to the arms of God's love, even as the returning prodigal was received by his father — by the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. This was Christ's mission; to declare God's justification of the repenting sinner. That he might show God to be at the same time just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.

We can therefore rely upon the mercy of God; we can feel sure that, if we go to him as children to a father, he will receive us; "he will in no wise cast us out." But we cannot claim the merit of this reception; it is not because of what *we* have done, and all the boasting of the self-righteous is excluded. It is to God's mercy alone, in Jesus Christ, that we owe our acceptance. The prime and perhaps only condition on which we receive forgiveness of our past sins is an act which, by its nature, excludes merit. It is an act of self-renunciation; the prostration before God

of the self-convicted sinner; the act of sincere confession and repentance; in a word, the act of self-surrender to God, which by the Scripture is called Faith. Not belief only, that belief which the devils also may have even while they tremble; not that belief which is often an exercise of the barren intellect, and is no more than the willing or unwilling acceptance of certain opinions; but Faith, which is the deepest experience of the soul,—an act by which our whole relation towards God is changed; by which we are brought from the attitude of distrust and rebellion to that of children who, although with tears in their eyes, exclaim, Abba, my Father!—this is Christian faith.

This is the condition on which God has promised, through Christ, to forgive our sins. If it be fulfilled, he has promised that the record of the past shall be blotted out. At the foot of the cross, where we learn to believe, the burden falls from our back, and we start forward upon a new race with heaven in our view. A long and arduous race,—but we begin it with light hearts, full of hope, sure of obtaining the prize, if we run with patience, looking unto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith.

The law of God is therefore not made void. We acknowledge its full force by that act of faith, which is the condition of pardon. We place ourselves under the condemnation of God's law; we wait for sentence to be passed upon us; and instead thereof, hear the words of the Divine Saviour, "Depart in peace, thy faith hath saved thee"; "Go and sin no more."

The law of God is not made void; it is established as completely as if its utmost penalty had been exacted. The continuance of God's favor is also made to depend upon a renewed life, a life of filial obedience, without which we again fall into condemnation.

Nay, something more than this is true. The forgiveness of sin does not remove all evil consequences. It removes the worst, which is our estrangement from God, but there are others which remain. Although we may be restored to his favor and may feel in our hearts the earnest of heavenly bliss, it requires long years of striving to rid our souls of the stains which sin has left there.

The intemperate man may be reformed, he may feel that his reconciliation with God is made, but will the evil effects of past transgression quickly disappear? Will not even the appetite for that which was his ruin remain and return upon him, a morbid craving for that which he strives to hate? And so it is with all our sins. We may repent of them, we may forsake them, we may feel that through God's mercy in Jesus Christ they are forgiven, and yet their evil consequences may remain,—increasing the difficulty of our onward progress, returning upon us in perverted tastes, in sinful imaginings, in weakness of resolution, so that we are often compelled to exclaim, “That which we do, we allow not, but that which we would not, we do.” Such is the true experience of the sinner, even of him who has found hope in Christ. It is a further vindication of God's law; it is a further evidence that those who trifle with their souls incur a dreadful risk, and must, to a certain extent, reap that which they sow.

God may forgive them, but he still leaves a token in their souls, by which they may see how narrow has been their escape. They may be saved, but it is so as by fire. Therefore it is that the redeemed in Christ, while they labor to work out their own salvation, must do it with fear and trembling. Thus, again, do we see that the law of God is not made void by the terms of reconciliation which he offers; yea, it is rather established.

One part, therefore, of the doctrine of reconciliation we can understand perfectly. I mean, so far as it requires a change in us. The change from worldliness to devotion; from rebellion to childlike self-surrender; from distrust to faith; from self-seeking and pride to self-denial and humility. It is a change which begins in a renewed heart and is completed in a renewed life. This is our reconciliation to God. We also understand how it is effected in us. By the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus; by the messages of love which he brings to us from the Father; by his holy example; by his instructions in righteousness; by his sufferings and death; by his promises of eternal life; by his resurrection from the dead; by his ascension into heaven; by his intercession for us with the Father; and by the influences of the Holy Spirit, which are given through him;—by the whole Gospel dispensation.

It is not only that Christ has taught us of the Father, but much more, because the Father is manifest in the Son. The Divine attributes, however explained to us, we could but imperfectly understand. We might still have a lingering fear, that the justice of an Infinite Being could not be satisfied, without the full punishment of the offender. But when we read the history of Christ himself, the image of the invisible God, and see how perfectly justice and mercy are joined together in him, not as conflicting attributes, but as only different exhibitions of the same parental love, stern or gentle, according to the necessity of each case, we can understand how God is just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus; how he can condemn sin and yet pardon the sinner; “not desiring the death of any, but that all should turn to him and live.” It is thus that Christ showed himself to us, and it is in this attribute of justice, tempered by mercy, that we receive him as the manifestation of the

Father, — the Word made flesh. We contend that there is no view of God's justice, which can be correct, that does not find its manifestation and development in Christ.

Such is the effect on us, and such are the means by which it is produced. This is therefore the practical part of our subject. So far as we are concerned in the work of reconciliation with God, this is all that we need to know. We know that God is willing to receive us; we know the conditions on which we shall be received; every motive for coming to him, and every encouragement, is given; we see from what source help will come to our infirmities; we know enough of God's counsels to be sure that our seeking will not be in vain.

Upon all this there is scarcely any controversy among Christians. Here, as in almost all other doctrines, the controversy is not concerning that which is practical, for the practical is almost always plain. It concerns questions to which we can give no positive answer. It is upon subjects which are for the great part beyond our reach. There are some points of difficulty of this sort in the doctrine of atonement; questions of theology, rather than of religion. Such for example as these: In the work of reconciliation, is not a change in God also needed, as well as in us? How did the death of Christ make it safe for God to forgive sin in a sense in which it was not before safe? What effect upon the counsels of God does the mediation of Christ produce? In what sense did Christ die for us and suffer in our stead? The questions are of great interest, but while I state them you see that they are chiefly above our comprehension. We may speculate concerning them, but cannot arrive at certain conclusions. We shall attempt to answer them, however, so far as the Scripture guides us, next Sunday evening.

THE ATONEMENT.

GOD WAS IN CHRIST, RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM.—2 Cor. v. 19.

IN our inquiries last Sunday, we examined the more practical part of the doctrine of atonement or reconciliation. We saw that, to effect reconciliation with God, a radical change is needed in us. The question now arises, Is a corresponding change needed in God himself? Let me again say, that until we can penetrate more deeply into the Divine nature than we now can, it is a question to which we can give no clear answer.

Of all the attributes of God there is none more completely beyond our comprehension than his unchangeableness or immutability. We are taught, on the one hand, that in him there is no change, neither shadow of turning; but on the other, that he is a Father who pities his children, who does not afflict willingly, who answers our prayers, who forgives our sins. All of which implies that his countenance towards us changes, that his dealings with us change, that he regards us with different feelings at different times, according to the relation in which we stand towards him. I think that this is the general representation of God in the

Scriptures. He is shown to us, not as an abstract order of the universe, stern and unvarying, uninfluenced by prayer, unchanged by repentance, but as a Heavenly Father, with all the attributes of tenderness and compassion which belong to that name.

If that is the true representation, it seems impossible that his feelings should be the same towards the hardened rebel, and the repentant sinner, and the glorified saint. Our own hearts tell us that it cannot be. Yet if God is immutable, how can it be otherwise? Some will answer, that he is like the sun in the heavens, always shining with clear and benignant rays; and that the clouds which veil him from our eyes, namely our sins, work no change in him, although they change his relation toward us. Perhaps it is a right answer, but I confess it seems to me to make our whole relations with God too mechanical. The heart yearns for personal affection. We long for the smile of approbation, not a seeming smile, but the real smile of tenderness and parental love. Whether it is weakness or not, I do not know, but I am sure that our hearts are more moved by the representation of God in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the Father cannot wait to be sought for, but goes out to meet his returning child and falls upon his neck and kisses him, than by all the abstract arguments of God's unchanging goodness that have ever been written. It may be unphilosophical, but perhaps, when we know more, we shall find that the philosophy which requires us to be untrue to our nature is "falsely so called."

I cannot but look with suspicion upon any system of religion which philosophizes away our natural affections. When we lie under the burden of sin, our hearts tell us that we are at enmity with God, and that he is thereby estranged from us. Not that he regards us with any thing

like human anger, for he loves us even then ; but there is the estrangement which holiness must feel towards sin. There is a desire for our return and the feeling of approbation, the renewal of that kind of love which had been withdrawn, when we come to him and say, " Father, we have sinned against Heaven and before thee." In our theory, we may say that there is no change ; but it is a theory which our feelings do not recognize. It is an intuition of our nature that God loves us in a different sense, when we return to him, from that in which he loved us before.

You will see, however, from my whole manner of speaking, that I do not believe in such a change in God as is sometimes taught. Many persons teach the doctrine of atonement as though the chief difficulty were on the side of God, and not on that of the sinner. They speak of God's being reconciled to man, much more than of man's being reconciled to God. They represent God as having been full of anger, of vindictive wrath, ready to hurl punishment upon sinners, unwilling and unable to forgive them, until his anger was appeased by the sufferings and death of Christ, who endured the punishment of the guilty.

We reject this view, first, because the Scripture uniformly represents that the cause of Christ's coming into the world was not the wrath of God, but his love. " God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life." " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And still more strongly, " In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." I repeat, that this is not the occasional, but the uniform, statement of the Scripture. There is no passage which says or

implies that God's anger with the sinner was the cause of Christ coming, or that Christ came to make him merciful. His coming was a proof of mercy; it was the *effect* of God's love. God's anger is not of a kind that needs to be appeased.

Another reason why we reject such a theory of God's anger is this: The Scriptures represent that Christ is the manifestation of God. In his character, therefore, we learn the attributes of God. This is our best instruction concerning the meaning of God's justice and mercy, of his anger and love. But according to the view of the Divine wrath just now considered, God and Christ are placed in the strongest contrast; one all anger, the other all love; one all justice, the other all mercy; one seeking to punish, the other seeking to save. Such a view cannot be correct. God is love, and Christ is the image of his love. In no respect is the Son more perfectly the manifestation of the Father, than in this.

Thirdly: We are confirmed in this view, because there is not a single passage in the Bible in which God is said to be reconciled to man, but always that man is to be reconciled to God. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom. v. 10. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, Be ye reconciled to God." 2 Cor. v. 18-20. Here is a full statement of the subject before us. It is God pleading with us through Christ, as a Father

pleads with his erring children. He is ready to be reconciled to them, whenever they will come to him. He encourages them to come, he waits for them, he goes out to meet them. In the work of reconciliation which must be effected before they can be received, the *difficulty* is not on his part, but on theirs alone.

If, therefore, we admit that a change takes place in the feelings of God towards the returning sinner, it is not a change from vindictive wrath to overflowing love, from a God who is all justice to a God of all mercy, but it is a change from one kind of love to another. As the earthly parent loves his children, both when they are rebellious and when they are repentant, so does God love us all and always. If it is a different kind of love, it arises from the necessity of the case, in the dealings of a being infinitely holy towards those who are frail and sinful.

We think that no other view of God is either Scriptural or reasonable. It presents him to us, not only as a God, but as a Father, wise in his compassion; in whom the attributes of justice and mercy are only the different exercise of the same love.

The next question which arises is this: What effect upon the counsels of God does the mediation of Christ produce? By the mediation of Christ we mean, not only his sufferings and death, but the whole Gospel dispensation. His coming down from heaven, his instructions, his life and holy example, his precepts, his sufferings and death, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven at the right hand of the Father, to make intercession for us. This is the whole Gospel dispensation. We understand it all to be included in Christ's work as the mediator between God and man.

What effect did it produce upon the counsels of God towards the sinner? Here again our limited faculties pre-

sent a difficulty. It is a question which we cannot answer perfectly, until by our searching we can find out God, and enter into the secret places of his wisdom. We believe the Gospel dispensation was *needful*. It does not express the whole truth to say that the coming of Christ was desirable, as a means of salvation, for it was indispensable. From the beginning, it was a part of God's counsel towards man. It is an essential link in the chain, by which God draws the sinner to himself. In the plan of salvation we cannot dispense with Christ: "No man," he says, "can come to the Father but by me." "I am the vine, ye are the branches. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." Words cannot express more strongly than these, the personal necessity of Christ to us. I could give you a hundred instances of the same sort, teaching in the strongest terms our dependence upon the Gospel dispensation, for the hope, and in the work, of salvation.

But if you ask me why God has so appointed, or if he could not have devised some other means by which the same gracious work would have been accomplished, you ask me unwisely, and it would be unwise in me to attempt an answer. It is enough for us that there is one way; that if we come to God in penitence and faith, as Christ has taught us to come, we shall find forgiveness and acceptance with him; that under the Gospel dispensation there is no stumbling-block in our path to heaven, except deliberate and continued sin. If we are delivered from the body of this death, we should thank God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, without being too curious to know whether God could not have found some other means, equally effectual, for our deliverance.

There is no difficulty in the belief that man's salvation

depends upon the mediation of Christ. Consider it either as a work done for us, or as a prayer offered for our sake. In either case, the Scripture doctrine of the absolute necessity of Christ's coming, and of his sufferings and death, is according to the analogy of God's general dealing with us, and to our belief as Christians in the efficacy of prayer. Nearly all the blessings which come to the world, come through the faithful exertions of the good. It is to the holy throng of apostles and martyrs, God's saints on earth, that all progress in wisdom and goodness, and all triumphs over evil, are due. If they had not lived, or if they had been unfaithful, a thousand blessings for which we are now thankful would never have reached us. It is in accordance with the same law, although in a higher exemplification of it, that the work of Christ was performed. We may not understand its full efficacy, but we can understand its necessity, and that from its faithful performance our salvation proceeds.

And so, if we consider Christ's mediation as a prayer, or continued intercession with God for our sake, the Scriptural doctrine of its efficacy presents no greater difficulty than the doctrine of prayer in general. We believe that our prayers are answered; that God is more ready to give his Holy Spirit to those that ask him, than an earthly parent is to bestow good gifts upon his children. But who shall explain this? Who shall tell us how prayer is answered? How can human asking change the mind of God towards us? We do not know, yet our affections, our inward experience, not less than the Scriptures, assure us that prayer is answered; that by prayer, and in answer to prayer, we obtain blessings which otherwise would never come to us. Nor can I perceive any greater unreasonableness in the belief that our prayers, one for another, are answered.

It is an instinct to pray for those we love. We cannot explain how the prayer can bring the blessing, but yet we cannot help praying. Such spiritual instincts should not be slighted because they are beyond the reach of intellect. To me they carry their own evidence. I believe in God, not so much because it can be proved by argument, as because it is a necessity of my nature. For the same reason I believe in prayer, and the Scripture strongly confirms the belief. It teaches that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. If we knew more of God, and of the spiritual world, and of the laws by which all spiritual beings are bound together in one mysterious chain, from the lowest to the highest, we might be able to understand how the prayers of the good may be answered in behalf of the wicked, and that the nearer to God we come in purity and love, the more effectual our prayers will be. We then might understand how the intercession of one like Jesus, the beloved Son of God, can be an indispensable influence and a real agency in the redemption of the world. Such, at least, is the Scriptural doctrine, and as such we are content to receive it. Christ then becomes to us the living head of the Church. He is not only our benefactor through his life and sufferings on earth, but he also liveth to make intercession for us with the Father. In our strugglings against sin and our efforts to rise, it is an unspeakable comfort to know, that we have the sympathy and prayers and spiritual aid of one so pure and good, who was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, who was made perfect through suffering, and is now exalted at the right hand of God.

We now proceed to a point which has involved much discussion and given rise to a multitude of theories. How did the sufferings and death of Christ make it *safe* for God

to forgive sin, in a sense in which it was not before safe? There are some who say, that it was by Christ's suffering the full penalty of sin, and thereby making full satisfaction to the law, that he enabled the sinner to go free. A theory which we cannot receive, chiefly for two reasons.

First, it leaves no room for God's mercy. If a debt is fully paid, we owe thanks to him who paid it, but not to him who exacts the payment. Such is not the doctrine of the Bible, which teaches us that God freely forgives; that our trespasses are not imputed to us, "through his forbearance," not through his exaction of the penalty from another. Christ teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," which is not consistent with the idea of the debts being paid, either by the offender himself, or by any one else for him. If a debt is paid, there can be a release, but, properly speaking, there is no room for remission.

Secondly, the chief penalty of sin, the only real penalty, is remorse of conscience and estrangement from God, and by the nature of the soul no one can endure this penalty for another. As a matter of fact, also, Christ did not endure it. No remorse of conscience ever visited him. However mysterious and inexplicable his sufferings may have been, this never made any part of them. Never for a moment did he feel estrangement from God; never for a moment was the love of God withdrawn from him. In the agony of human suffering, he exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But perhaps even these words were spoken, as calling to his mind the whole of the triumphant psalm of David from which they are taken; and even in that dreadful hour we perceive his nearness to God, in the comforting words spoken to the repentant criminal, and in his prayer for his enemies, and

in his dying words, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." No ; Christ truly suffered, the just for the unjust, but he did not suffer as a sinner, and therefore he did not suffer the punishment of sin. By the blindness of human judgment, he was numbered among the transgressors, and suffered an ignominious and cruel death, but he was always the beloved Son, in whom God was well pleased. He was never nearer to God, he was never further removed from the punishment of sin, than when his sufferings for our sake were the most terrible.

We cannot believe, therefore, in the theory of Christ's sufferings just stated. But we can perceive that in another way the Gospel dispensation, in which we include the sufferings and death of Christ, has made it safe that sin should be forgiven, under God's moral government, in a sense in which it might not otherwise have been safe. The two essential requisites to make pardon safe are these : first, to secure in the offender such a disposition as will lead him to a true and permanent reformation ; and secondly, to maintain the sanctity of the law so that it shall not be brought into contempt, but that, while the sinner is forgiven, his abhorrence of sin may be increased, and the heinousness of sin, in God's sight, be made more plainly to appear. When these two requisites are attained, forgiveness of sin becomes safe. It is safe to the sinner himself, because his reformation is secure ; it is safe to the moral government of God, because his law is not brought into contempt, but is honored even more highly. This is precisely the result which the Gospel dispensation accomplishes. It arouses the sinner to those emotions, by which alone his reconciliation with God can be effected, and his reformation secured,—the emotions of repentance, of self-renunciation, of love, —which are in themselves a complete renewal of the ir

ward life, and thus brings him to such a relation towards God, that the word of pardon can be safely spoken.

Such has been the experience of hundreds of thousands. The ministry of Christ, and especially his sufferings and death, have been the influence by which more souls have been aroused from the sleep of sin, than by all others beside. But at the same time the hatred of sin has been increased. The manner in which pardon is brought to the sinner is the most dreadful condemnation of sin. It is offered to us at the expense of so much suffering, that when we read the account of it, we lament our sins, by which it was made necessary, more bitterly than at any other time. If it had been proclaimed from heaven, that God is ready to forgive the repenting sinner, the message would have been the same that we have now received, but how different would have been the effect ! We might then indeed have supposed that sin is a light evil, and its record easily blotted out. But when we read the narrative of Christ's sufferings, we perceive how heinous sin must be in the sight of God ; our consciences are awakened to discern how terrible its consequences must be, here and hereafter. If it were a small evil, if escape from it were easy, if its consequences were temporary and trivial, would the Heavenly Father have appointed his holy child Jesus to a life of such suffering, and to a death of such agony, for its removal ? We think not ; nay, we are sure that it could not be. The whole Gospel dispensation, as God has directed it, impresses us deeply with the awfulness of sin ; it brings before us the vision of its terrible consequences more distinctly, by its accents of love mingled with the records of suffering, than could have been done by the most fearful threats of punishment, or the most vindictive execution of the law.

Something of the same benignant purpose we see in

God's general providence. It is through the suffering and sacrifices of the good, through their pains, self-denials and martyrdoms, that the sins of the wicked receive their sternest rebuke, and the sinner himself is reformed. Nor are there any circumstances, under which we hate our sins so much, as when suffering is endured by those whom we love, for the sake of their removal. How much more do we feel this, when brought home to us by the sufferings of one at the same time so pure and so exalted as Jesus Christ! In proportion as we believe in them, the effect is deepened; it grows with our spiritual growth, it strengthens with our spiritual strength. It is not a mysterious influence, but natural and unavoidable; the working of the human heart, when softened by the dews of God's grace. It leads to the perfect vindication of the sacredness of God's law, at the same time that pardon is offered to the sinner and his return to righteousness secured.

There is one other question under the doctrine of Atonement, which we must consider, although in but very few words. In what sense did Christ die *for us*? The language of Scripture with reference to it is various and strong, — sometimes figurative, sometimes literal, sometimes obscure. He is our ransom, our sacrifice, our sin-offering; he is made sin for us, he bore our punishment, the chastisement of our peace is laid upon him, by his stripes we are healed; he has borne our griefs, he was bruised for our iniquities, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all. All of this is Scriptural language. What does it mean? A part of it is manifestly figurative, as when it is said "he hath made him to be sin for us," and "upon him is laid the iniquity of us all." Some persons have understood even this literally, and thus Martin Luther taught that Christ was the greatest sinner, murderer, robber, and the

like, that the world ever saw, because all the sins of all the world were accumulated in him, to receive their condemnation and their punishment. I do not know what men mean, when they use such language, and it is charitable to suppose that they do not know themselves. There is no danger of any one using it at the present day, and no need of proving its absurdity.

In the same manner the word *ransom* has been interpreted literally, and some of the Christian Fathers taught that the sufferings of Christ were the ransom, or purchase-money, paid by God and received by the enemy of souls, the Devil, as the price of the sinner's release. We shall not follow such interpretations further; they belong to days gone by, and are a monument of human weakness.

The whole language which we have quoted we think means no more nor less than this: that Christ suffered for us, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. Whatever is expressed more than these words imply is figurative, and not literal. The sufferings and death of Christ were necessary as a means of our redemption from sin; they were therefore endured in consequence or on account of our sins; they were our ransom, the price paid for us, the cost of our deliverance. "The chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," because this was the means through which our peace was obtained. "By his stripes we are healed," because the healing of our souls, in the forgiveness of our sins, is the result of that dispensation of which his sufferings were a needful part. "We are washed in his blood," because the shedding of his blood leads to our cleansing. He suffered and died in our stead, (although this is not a Scriptural expression,) because *his* sufferings and death save *us* from condemnation. As to all this language, there has been much disputing about words. I find in orthodox

creeds and books a great deal to which I cannot assent. But whenever I converse with individuals who receive such creeds, and learn what they mean by the words used, the differences gradually fade away. I believe that the majority of them hold in fact nearly the same doctrine which I have now explained. Even when they speak of a *vicarious* atonement, they very often mean no more than we can accept. There is a plain and real sense in which I can use that word, for it is true that Christ suffered *for us*, and by this means, through the grace of God, we escape the suffering which our sins would otherwise have brought upon us. If he had not come upon earth and fulfilled his ministry, we must have died in our sins, for we are not able to guide ourselves nor save ourselves, and it is through him alone that we come near to God. There may be others who believe more than these words convey, and who teach that the wrath of God was literally laid on Jesus Christ; but I seldom meet them, and think that their number is daily becoming less. For ourselves, we are satisfied to know that "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The way for our return to God is open, and he is waiting to be gracious.

DATE DUE

MAR 10 1987	DEC 10 1991	
SEP 20 1987	DEC 28 1992	
MAR 30 1987	DEC 30 1992	
MAR 23 1987	JAN 13 1993	
APR 6 1988	JAN 20 1993	
MAR 24 1988	NOV 11 1993	
NOV 10 1988	NOV 01 1993	
NOV 08 1988	MAR 05 1997	
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