

It belongs to His perfect character to visit with the penalty, and secure the honour and dignity of government. In His private character as our Heavenly Father He may gratify His love and affection for us, whenever that can be done without conflicting with the administration of justice and the stability of His government.

Herein is love that He sent His Son to die for us. That death of Jesus was an atonement for sin. He being divine as well as human, by the offering up of Himself, made it consistent with justice for God to remit sin, to pardon the offender, and treat him as though he had not sinned. The figurative language under which this is represented, is various. It is termed an "Atonement." Those who are saved by it are said to be "justified," "pardoned," "ransomed," or "redeemed," "bought with a price," "reconciled to God," &c.

Misconception comes out of pressing the language of Scripture, making more of it than was intended by the Spirit of God, instituting figures of our own and pressing doctrinal statements out of them contrary to the Bible. "Gospel truths have been squared according to human measures and models." "Resembling processes have been represented as identical ones."

Thus men have spoken of the Atonement as the actual payment of a debt, and of imputed righteousness as the actual transfer of Christ's righteousness to man, and of man's guilt to Christ.

It does not appear that the Word of God anywhere speaks of the Atonement as the payment of our debt, nor does it justify the employment of the figure without careful qualification. Sin is more than a debt. It is a *crime*. "Debts are transferable but crimes are not, a third person may cancel the one, but he can only obliterate the effects of the other—the desert of the criminal remains. The debtor is accountable to his creditor as a private individual. The criminal is amenable to the magistrate, or to the head of the family as a public person."

A debt may be forgiven by a creditor without payment, or another may pay it for us. To acquit the debtor in the first case would be an act of mercy, in the second an act of justice. It is not a favour to remit a debt when it is paid, *justice* then requires that it should be cancelled. On the other hand a crime cannot be condoned without invading law and justice; nor in the ordinary exercise of his office, can a magistrate suffer a third person to stand in the place of the offender. In extraordinary cases a satisfaction may be made to law and justice, as to the spirit of them, while the letter is dispensed with. Such was the atonement made to God for sin. It was not then the case of a debtor when, satisfaction being once accepted, justice required his complete discharge, but it was that of a criminal, where satisfaction is made to the wounded honour of the law and the authority of the Lawgiver. Justice though it admits of his discharge, yet no otherwise requires it, than as it may have been matter of promise to the substitute." It may be promised under stipulated conditions; but it is still an act of grace and mercy on the part of the Lawgiver. Representations have been made by persons who run off on one idea, and do not clearly discriminate what is taught in the word, from the conceptions they get from their own one-sided aspect, that by the atonement a debt is paid, and all sin is forgiven, pardoned in fact before it is committed; that now though it may be becoming in a sinner to confess his sin, yet he need not ask forgiveness. Some even refuse to employ the petition in the "Lord's prayer," "Forgive us our trespasses" &c. This mistake arises from a want of discrimination, bringing our dogmas to the bible to prove them, instead of forming our principles from what God has taught. The unqualified statements in some of our poetry lead men astray such as; "Jesus paid it all, all the debt I owe," &c. If the debt is paid in this unqualified sense, which God's word does not declare, then the sinner is put into a position in which he has not only nothing remaining for him to do, but he has nothing more to ask of grace. His acquittal may be demanded as an act of justice. Man is pardoned, and the work of the Gospel is to persuade him to believe it; on this principle he is condemned not for