



TRUTH, HOLINESS,

LIBERTY, LOVE.

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THE ATONEMENT.

It is sometimes said of Unitarians that they deny the Atonement. This charge is a difficult one to meet, because of its vagueness. It is difficult to find out what the doctrine of atonement is that we are accused of denying. There have been almost as many different schemes of atonement as there have been different writers upon the subject. Princeton says one thing; Andover another; Oberlin still differs from either.

The first and most common scheme of atonement is, that the sufferings of Christ were designed to appease the wrath of God. God was angry with men on account of the sin of Adam, as well as their own sins. God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, interposed to turn away his wrath, to receive in his own person the inflictions of God's vindictive pleasure, and thus rescue man from it. We do reject this scheme of atonement most distinctly and emphatically. We say that it has no foundation in Scripture, and that it is inconsistent with the nature and character of God. It is, moreover, inconsistent with itself. On the supposition that the doctrine of the Trinity were true, sin is committed against God, the whole Trinity,—against one person as much as another. The second person cannot abandon his place in the Trinity and come on earth and make atonement to the whole Trinity, because he must be at the same time one of the persons of the Trinity to which the atonement is made. The very supposition upon which this scheme is raised is an impossibility, and therefore requires no further discussion.

The next scheme of atonement which we shall mention may be called "the satisfaction scheme." It is said that mankind has broken God's law, and thus impaired its authority.—If men were pardoned merely on repentance, without the legal penalty being exacted from some one, the law would become a nullity, and no longer have power to control God's creatures. It was necessary that some one should be punished, lest the Deity should lose his dignity and respect. Every sin is an infinite evil, because committed against an infinite God. An infinite atonement is necessary to do away an infinite evil. It was necessary that Christ should be both God and man, in order to make an infinite sacrifice. But, unfortunately for this theory, those who adopt it are compelled to confess that God is incapable of suffering, so that the human part alone suffered, and the infinite atonement is at last explained away. Besides, Christ upon the cross exclaimed, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and with his last breath said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." If God made a part of his person, he could not have forsaken him. And if he remained to make the infinite atonement, that prayer did not correspond to facts. But this idea of satisfying the law is wholly gratuitous. Nothing is said of it in Scripture.

What, then, is the atonement, and in what sense do Unitarians believe in it? In the first place, I observe that the word is found but once in the New Testament, and then it is the translation of a Greek word everywhere else rendered *reconciliation*. Had it been here so translated, we should never have heard either of the word or the doctrine of atonement.

The simple facts of the case are these. A disobedient child is always at variance with his father.—There can be no reconciliation, or at-one-ment, between them, until the son repents, reforms, and returns humbled and obedient to his father. Such is the condition of those whom Christ endeavoured to reconcile to God. Reconciliation is a voluntary act, and can be brought about only by persuasion.—Christ was a teacher. His whole mission was teaching, in its largest sense. His death was the consequence of his teaching, and of his assumption of the office of the Messiah. The faith which he claimed from his disciples had nothing to do with his nature. It was, that he had been sent by God, and instructed and empowered to do what he did, and teach what he taught. That teaching was his principal office, he more than once asserts. "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not walk in darkness." "Belief on him as a teacher was the belief which secured salvation." "Verily, verily, I say unto

you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." To his disciples he said, before his crucifixion, "Now ye are clean, through the word that I have spoken unto you." It was his doctrine, then, not his death, which cleansed his disciples from sin. Indeed, Christ's death without his doctrines could have no influence upon the world, for men cannot be forgiven unless they repent. It is only by bringing men to repentance and obedience that he can be of any service to them. To reject him as a teacher is to reject him altogether. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, that shall judge him at the last day. For I have not spoken of myself, but the Father, which hath sent me; he gave me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak, and I know that his commandment is life everlasting."

One part of Christ's teaching was the readiness of God to forgive the penitent. Such is the meaning of the parable of the prodigal son. This doctrine of the forgiveness of sins made a part, and a substantial part, of Christ's teaching; it became a part of the new covenant or dispensation of religion, a part of God's revealed and stipulated way of dealing with men.

In the course of his teaching, Jesus was arraigned by the Jews as guilty of blasphemy in pretending to be their promised Messiah, and for teaching the people in the name of God.—They brought him before their highest court, and the high-priest solemnly interrogated him, "Art thou the Christ?" Here was his whole mission and ministry brought to the test. If he had shrunk from that avowal, there would have been an end to his mission and his religion. The world at large would never have known that such a person had lived. But he said, "I am," and was sentenced to execution. He shed his blood, then, in bearing testimony to his divine mission; his blood was the seal of the new covenant, a part of which covenant was the promise of God to forgive the penitent. This is what he meant, then, in instituting the supper, when he took the cup and said,— "This is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."— "My blood is the seal of that covenant, which promises the forgiveness of sins. This is the sense in which Jesus was the 'Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.'" The mere pardon of sin is of little consequence, unless at the same time there is a change of character. It would have been of no use for the father to forgive the prodigal son, unless he had repented. If he had come back impenitent, the state of things would not have been improved at all, though the father had forgiven the impenitent son. Christ is the ambassador of God's mercy to men. He pronounced them pardon on repentance, and acceptance on the ground of obedience,—reward even for every good act. But that embassy is made infinitely more impressive by the crucifixion.—That Christ foresaw and foretold.—"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

So we find that it is the moral effect of Christ's death on which the writers of the New Testament principally dwell, when speaking of the subject. "Who suffered the just for the unjust,"—that he might appease the Divine wrath, or vindicate the honor of the law?—no: but "that he might bring us unto God." "Who gave himself for us,"—that he might expiate our sins?—no: but "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."—"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed by corruptible things, as silver and gold,"—from what?—the wrath of God, the penalties of the law?—no: but "from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers," from your vicious habits and practices, which were handed down from preceding generations, "by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."—Now there is no possible way in which the blood of Christ can reform men from their evil habits, except by giving moral power and efficacy to the gospel, in persuading men to abandon sin and practise holiness.

Such, then, are the views of Unitarians with

respect to the atonement. They do not believe that Christ died to appease God's wrath,—they do not believe that he died to satisfy the claims of the broken law. They do believe that he died to give power and efficacy to his Gospel, to fix on him the faith and affections of mankind, that they might be delivered from sin and be induced to become holy, just, and good; to break off their sins by righteousness, and their iniquities by turning to God, and thus become reconciled to that Father from whom they were alienated by wicked works.

The Unitarian hopes to be saved, not by his own merits, nor by the merits of Christ, but by the free, unbought, spontaneous mercy of God, of which boundless and unchangeable love the mission and death of Christ are an expression and a manifestation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The atonement, or reconciliation, is not so much a speculative as a practical subject, in which every one is interested. Each one knows whether he is reconciled to God, or whether he is estranged from him. Christ has told us how we can find peace. "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."

DR. CHANNING'S VIEWS OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

[The following extract is taken from the Memoir of Channing recently published. It is a portion of a discourse preached by him in May 1842, in which he reviews his previous ministry. He was ordained about nineteen years before.]

"In regard to the person or rank of Christ, you well know that a controversy had prevailed during my ministry, in which every minister had been compelled to take a part. My views on this subject have varied but little since my first connexion with you, and have been made known to you with entire frankness. The great fundamental principle of Christian belief is, that Jesus Christ was anointed, sent, commissioned by God, that he derived all his authority and offices and power from God, so that God who sent him is always to be adored as the first cause, the original, of whatever Christ communicates, and is to be our ultimate hope and confidence. I know nothing which appears to be more plainly a departure from this fundamental principle of Christian belief than the doctrine that Christ is God himself, equally entitled with the Father who sent him to the glory of originating our redemption, equally saving us by his own undivided, infinite power. To teach this is to resist the current of Scripture language and Scripture precepts, to withstand Christ's great purpose, which was to glorify his Father, and to shake the fundamental principle of natural as well as revealed religion, the *Unity of God*.

"My ministry on this point I look back upon with unmixed pleasure; nor have I any consciousness of having thus degraded Jesus Christ. His glory consists in the love with which God regarded him, in the offices with which God had invested him, in the likeness which he bears to God's purity and goodness,—not in being God himself; and they are the last to consult Christ's glory, who, instead of making him the brightest representative and the most exalted minister of his Father, throw a mist and doubtfulness over his whole nature, by making him the same being with his Father. I make these remarks with no disposition to bring reproach on any class of Christians; for I would not breathe a single word which might ever seem to be unkind. But the circumstances of my ministry compel me, in reviewing it, to refer to the controversy which has shaken the church, and in which I have been charged with conducting my people into ruinous error. That I have not erred I ought not to affirm with the decision and confidence too common in controversy, and therefore I would only say that I have inquired earnestly, and that inquiry has given me a calm, stable conviction of the great principle that Jesus Christ is a distinct being from God; a derived, dependent

being, not the self-existent and infinite Creator.

"Still, I have not been accustomed to preach Christ as a mere man. I have spoken of him as a peculiar being. He existed in a state of glory before his birth. Nor was his agency for our salvation confined to his teaching, and example, and suffering, and resurrection, while on the earth; but he is now a glorified, powerful agent in human affairs, our friend, benefactor, intercessor, and strengthener, and hereafter he will be our judge. These views I have urged, not because the mere belief of them is to save, but because they have seemed to me fitted to create a more earnest, affectionate, reverent, and obedient regard to Jesus Christ,—such a regard as will lead us to form ourselves upon the model of his precepts and example.—This, this is the essential point, and he who is faithful here has a saving faith, be his views of Jesus whatever they may. The greatest and most dangerous error of the age is the substitution of opinion, speculation, controversy, of noise and bustle about religion, for the practice of Christ's precepts, especially of those precepts which peculiarly characterize his religion,—filial love towards God, and self-denying, all-forgiving, disinterested, mild, humble, patient charity towards men. This love, this charity,—which is the end of the Christian commandment, which is greater than faith and hope, which is the very spirit of Christ, which is *God dwelling in us*,—I have made supreme in my ministry; and I trust that I have not labored wholly in vain."

HUMILITY AND INDEPENDENCE.

No humility is thoroughly sound which is not thoroughly truthful. The man who brings misdirected or inflated accusations against himself, does so in a false humility, and will probably be found to indemnify himself on one side or another. Either he takes a pride in his supposed humility; or escaping in his self-condemnation from the darker into the lighter shades of his life and nature, he plays at hide and seek with his conscience. And true humility, being a wise virtue, will deal more in self-examination and secret contrition than in confession. For confession is often a mere luxury of the conscience,—used as the epicures of ancient Rome would use an emetic and a warm bath before they sat down to a feast. It is often also a very snare to the maker of it, and a delusion practised on the party to whom it is made. For, first, the faults may be such as words will not adequately explain; secondly, the plea of "guilty," shakes judgment in her seat; thirdly, the indulgence shown to confession might be better bestowed on the shame which conceals; for this tends to correction, whereas confession will many times stand instead of penitence to the wrong-door; and sometimes even a sorrowful penitence stands in the place of amendment, and is washed away in its own tears.—*Taylor's Notes from Life*.

EVILS OF FANATICISM.

[From *Universalist Watchman*, published in Montpelier, Vermont.]

We learn with regret, that there are quite a number of persons in various portions of this State, who are still afflicted with the Miller mania, "Perfectionism," &c., &c. Some still indulged the wild vagary of the end of the world, and the common notion of a general conflagration of the Universe and the day of judgment. Others indulge the idle whim that they have become perfect—that they shall never die a physical death, &c.

In one of these families where a child was sick, the parents refused entirely to send for a doctor of any kind, affirming that the Lord would cure it, until their neighbors expostulated with them and finally censured their proceedings, when they finally called a physician—but too late. Nothing could then be done. It lingered a short time and died? O, Fanaticism! Thou art both blind and cruel!

The path that leads to fortune, too, often passes through the narrow, defiles of meanness, which a man of exalted spirit cannot stoop to tread.