SABBATH EVENING.

Hushed are the harsher sounds of earth,
Silent the murmur of children's mirth,
'Tis Sabbath Eve.
The breeze with gentle touch and free,
Caresses the leaves in each green tree,
And brings thoughts of distant friends to me,
For them I grieve.

The flowers their bright heads meekly nod,
Breathing a prayer unto their God,
At this holy hour.
All nature joins in a voiceless song,
Praising that One to whom praises belong,
To whose alter our souls will ever throng,
And praise His power.

Tinted the skies with twilight's flush,
With a flame of gold and a tender blush,
As the rose's heart;
Whisp'ring to mortals a heaven born thought,
Breathing sweet peace to the sorrow-fraught,
Hope and courage to bear their lot,
In life's dull mart.

—*Maude Gardner.*

SERMON.

Preached before the N. S. Western Association at Brookfield, June 18, 1894.

BY REV. J. H. FORHAN.

Isa. 53:8.—The Extent of the Atonement.

I have found it impossible to state positively, in this sermon, what the atonement is; and yet I know you have a right to expect and will expect me to define my subject before attempting to treat upon it. It does seem strange at first view that it should be difficult to find a satisfactory definition for a doctrine made so prominent in the Scriptures of both Testaments, and referred to so frequently in the preaching of the gospel; but when it is remembered that this, like the doctrine of the Trinity, is merely stated not explained in the Bible, it will not be considered wonderful that no expression in human language can be made to convey a perfect idea of the atonement. The atonement is one of the most evident doctrines and at the same time one of the most profound mysteries of revealed religion. There have been as many theories of the atonement advanced as there have been eminent writers on theological subjects. Each of these theories grew out of the writers' idea of the nature of sin on the one hand, and what would be required in Christ's nature and work to remove it on the other. There are substantially five theories of the atonement:

First, there is the EXAMPLE THEORY. According to this theory sin is fundamentally ignorance, hence it only required a man with perfect knowledge to set an example of right living before men in order to lead them back to rectitude.

The second is the MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY. Here the nature of sin is enmity, transgression. This theory makes it only necessary for Christ to suffer as a man, morally, as parents for their children, for example, that they may be won by an exhibition of grief into the right way.

The third is called the GOVERNMENTAL THEORY in which sin is rebellion, such as Satan's conflict with the divine government. According to this theory it was only necessary that God should send a human representative who should suffer all that the race ought to suffer, thus counterbalancing by his sufferings our guilt.

The fourth is called the MATERIAL SUBSTITUTION theory. Here Christ suffers as God and man united, and the *intensity* of His sufferings are supposed to equal all possible sufferings of the entire race, hence God is satisfied and man's salvation is made possible. This is the theory of the Roman Catholic church.

The fifth is called the MORAL SUBSTITUTION theory in which Christ's sufferings exert a moral influence sufficient to beget love for His perfect character.

Now it cannot be doubted that each of these theories, as well as others which have been advanced, contain much truth, but any one of them, or all of them together, must fail to make a perfectly satisfactory statement of this doctrine. I seriously doubt if a definition of the atonement is possible, and whether it is not sinful to go any further than to acknowledge that in some way the sufferings of Christ have made salvation possible to man. The great Dr. Channing, leader of American Unitarianism, has made a frank admission of the difficulty of arriving at any theory of the atonement. Naturally he would incline to the example theory yet he says: "A difference exists among us as to the precise influence of Christ's death on our forgiveness. Many suppose that the event contributes to our pardon, as it was a principal means of confirming his religion and of giving it a power over the mind; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed.

Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and I think that the Scriptures ascribe the remission of sins to Christ's death with an emphasis so peculiar that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing punishment, though the Scriptures may not reveal the way in which it contributed to this event."

Apart from the Bible, the necessity of an atonement appears in the history of our race. It is the agonizing cry of a universal conscience. In the light of this fact how can any man think lightly of the death of Jesus on the cross? Is the Iliad we are told that when the Grecian heroes embarking for the conquest of Troy are driven back by a storm, they are told that one of their chief deities must be "propitiated" by the sacrifice of the most lovely daughter of their commanding general.

The history of such customs becomes very instructive in the light of the Biblical doctrine of the atonement. How far the nations of antiquity were indebted to the institution of sacrifices by Jehovah for their customs, it is impossible to say, but clearly the doctrine of atonement by sacrifice is of divine origin; for it is written, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." All the sacrifices from that which Abel offered until the death of Jesus on the cross, are plainly connected with the forgiveness of sins. The fact that the death of Jesus takes away sin is stated; how it can do so is not stated; and so we will not attempt to formulate any theory of the atonement, but try to find out what the Bible says about it.

I.

The Scriptures teach that the death of Jesus of Nazareth on the cross was a sacrifice for sin, which completely PROPITIATES or gains the favor of God towards sinners who accept it as their sin-offering to the offended Jehovah.

The existence of a universal acknowledgment that the Divine Being has been offended by human transgression and needs in some way to be propitiated cannot be denied; and although this feeling has given rise to many shocking and abominable practices among those who did not desire to retain God in their knowledge, it yet bears witness to an innate conviction of a profound truth.

The fact that sin has been committed is bad enough. Sin against our fellow man; sin against our own persons. But when it once enters into the mind that all sin is really against the Creator of the universe, as David said, "Against *Thee, Thee only* have I sinned," then the impossibility of forgiveness without in some way making a favorable impression on the divine mind becomes apparent. As sin is against the infinite God, sin itself comes to be regarded as infinitely sinful; how then can an offering be found commensurate with the sinfulness of sin? This thought is, no doubt, the origin of human sacrifices. Revolting as such rites appear they still proclaim that the most costly is none too good to offer to the offended Deity. The Bible intensifies this idea by showing us that sin is so hateful to Jehovah that no possible human sacrifice can atone for it. Accordingly we are told that the sacrifice for sin which Jehovah could accept was prepared before man, the sinner, was created. Christ Jesus is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Before Adam was created, his Creator, "the Lord God," assumed human nature, and was able to appear to Adam in the garden and address him with a human voice. As soon as Adam fell the promise of the sacrifice of the Creator for the created was made. "The seed of the woman" was to be "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." Hence it is written of Him, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, *i. e.* the sacrifices ordained under the law, being only types of the true, could not be accepted by Jehovah as sufficient, but a body hast thou prepared me. "In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, lo, I come . . . to do thy will O God." Everywhere in the Scriptures we are assured that God is pleased with this sacrifice; that it is accepted as a sufficient atonement for man's transgression; that all who have sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression are redeemed by the sacrifice of the second Adam, who is human enough to be called our brother and divine enough to be called our God. It is in this way Paul proves that God can "be just and yet the justifier of him that believes."

Our Lord is hence called the "propitiation" as in Rom. 3:25, "Whom God has set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in His blood;" and as in 1st John 2:2, "He is the *propitiation* for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

But the sacrifice of Christ, God's son, on the cross not only *propitiates* or removes wrath from the mind of Jehovah, but it inclines him to be merciful to repenting sinners. The atonement thus becomes the active efficient means of removing our transgressions from us, and the fear of punishment from our minds. It hence becomes the means of reconciling God and man; and this is the meaning of the word translated reconciliation in 2nd Cor. 5:18. A leaving behind or passing over sin.

"All things are of God who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And as David said, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." The sin-offering thus becomes our "surety;" and assumes the responsibility of our salvation, taking our place in every possible sense. As Paul teaches, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

The efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice as a means of expiating the sins of believers and of bringing them into a final state of blessedness cannot be exaggerated. No expression of the most ardent Caristian enthusiast can equal the glorious reality. Even the pen of inspired writers fall short of it. The Apostle John exultantly proclaims believers to be sons of God *here* and *now*, but adds, "It does not now appear what we shall be, but when He (our Redeemer) shall appear we shall be like Him." Through Him, as He tells us in His gospel, we also receive power to become the sons of God. Paul also adds his testimony to the same truth when he tells us that through faith in Christ we become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We are adopted into His family and predestinated to become the likeness of His Son; and to enter upon the possession of an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled and that fadeth not away. Those who have received the atonement are encouraged to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and to anticipate the future glory, which has by the atonement become sure to them, and join the angelic chorus and shout "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing."

Paul's doctrine of justification by faith is based upon the efficacy of the atonement. A curse rests upon all who seek to be justified by their own works; "for it is written cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Paul's idea is that no one ever did or ever will keep the law perfectly, hence the necessity of some other plan for saving men. This plan is by faith in Him who magnified the law and made it honorable for His believing people. It is evident that the author of the Epistle to the Galatians intended to show that Abraham clearly apprehended the nature of the attonement, and trusted in it for salvation, and so it is written that Abraham was justified by faith and was accounted righteous in the same way all believers are.

This doctrine of substitution which was taught the chosen people all the way from Abel to Abraham, was reaffirmed under Moses by the institution of the Passover. The people at that time sunken in ignorance and superstition had no righteousness upon which to rely, and unless a substitute could be found they could not be redeemed from bondage; and not being able at that stage of their spiritual development to grasp the doctrine of atonement as we now understand it, the doctrine was symbolised for them by a lamb whose blood sprinkled on their door post would save them irrespective of their characters. The element of faith was present, but in a very low form. In the same way we are saved by the blood of the Lamb slain on Calvary. It may not be right to say the atonement saves irrespective of character, yet in a sense it is undoubtedly true, unless it can be shown that we are saved by virtue of our characters. Faith in Christ is designed to improve character, doubtless; but after we have done all, we must say with David, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin," and with Isaiah, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Thus far we have been speaking of the efficacy of the atonement in the salvation of the redeemed, but it is evident from the Scriptures that this is not all the truth touching the design of Christ's death. The scope of the atonement demands that we should include another class whose condition is affected by it in some way. This class is all the rest of mankind. Angels might properly be included, for they are affected truly by Christ's death. According to Peter they desire to look into this mystery, and according to Paul it is the design of our Lord's work to gather together in one all things in *heaven* and on earth, while our Lord assures us the angels rejoice over repenting sinners. I have, however designed to confine myself to the efficacy of the atonement respecting the human family, because for them it was particularly designed.

II.

In the second place then the scope of the atonement makes it necessary for us to believe that our Lord's death on the cross makes salvation possible to every member of Adam's fallen race.

By reading the 53rd of Isaiah and kindred passages in the Scriptures, one might suppose that the Messiah died for the Hebrew people only. The language of the 6th verse, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," being written by a Hebrew seer, could not be consistently applied by the people to any other nation than their own. Accordingly when the tongue of Zacharias was loosed he said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began. That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our father Abraham." The usual explanation of this is, that being Hebrews they spoke in a narrow, sectional and imperfect way, not fully comprehending the universal application of the atonement. This explanation is far from being satisfactory. When we remember that the prophets of the Hebrew people spoke by the Holy Ghost, such an explanation as I have referred to is equal to charging the Holy Spirit himself with ignorance of the design of Christ's sacrifice. A better explanation is this: Our Lord did truly die for the people whom He foreknew, and it was His great design to gather together in one the sons of God scattered abroad, yet His death did open the flood-gates of light, knowledge and salvation upon all nations. There is abundant proof that the prophets of Israel fully understood this. Isaiah said, "In Him shall the nations trust," and the aged Simeon holding the sacrifice in his arms exclaimed, "A light to lighten the Gentiles." The atonement having been made for *sin* does nothing more for the unredeemed sinner than make salvation possible to him. This is the element in the atonement upon which Gentile missions is based. This is not essentially a New Testament doctrine, but was preached by Abraham and all the prophets who worked for God under the old covenant. Proselites from every nation were admitted to the benefits of the covenant of the Lord upon the performance of the required rites; Jonah was sent to preach in Nineveh, and the various captivities though punishments for national sins were no doubt designed to diffuse the knowledge of salvation among the nations whither the chosen people were driven.

In the New Testament we would expect to find, and we do find a great revival of the missionary spirit. Increased knowledge of the breadth of the atonement begat increased desire for the salvation of all men. Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, says distinctly that Christ died for "every man," and the apostle John uses this language: "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Our Lord also declared God's love for the world, saying, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on Him should not perish."

The word used in both of these passages is *kosmos*, which means the universe. It is the equivalent of the Latin *mondus*, which means the earth as a whole as distinguished from any part of it as an island or continent. Then it comes to be used to mean the inhabitants of the world as a whole, as distinguished from any nation or party among men. In this latter sense the word is used in these passages.

It has been maintained that those who hold to particular redemption, or the application of the atonement to a chosen people for special ends, cannot preach a free salvation, but this is absurd, as particular redemption is a subject by itself in theology, and should not be confounded with the doctrine of a general atonement for sin.

The Master sent His servants into all the world to preach good news to every creature. As there is no other atonement, it is evident we are to offer this one to all men and assure them that there is salvation in no other. What an awful responsibility? Who among us realizes it? With this awful fact before us why are our Boards in debt?

I should observe before closing that the atonement extends to those of all nations who die in infancy. We are not told in what way the work of Christ saves infants and idots and all irresponsible persons, but we are assured of their salvation. David fully expected to meet the child of Bath-Sheba in the spirit world. Said the afflicted king, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." Yet David speaking by the Holy Ghost teaches the depravity of children. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He must therefore have believed that infants were saved by the atonement in some way not explained in the Bible. Our Lord distinctly affirms the salvation of infants. In the 18th chapter of Matt. and 3rd vs. He makes them the standard of the entrance of adults into the kingdom. "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Again in the 19th chap. He says plainly of them, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." Where faith in the great sacrifice is possible all are called to exercise it before they can secure salvation through the atonement; but where faith is impossible, as in the case of infants and idiots, we may believe that the Holy Spirit acts directly upon the soul, regenerating it and applying the atonement to such cases, and although conscious pardon cannot be, yet expiation and propitiation are secured for them. To sum up what we have said we conclude that the atonement secures the salvation of the redeemed beyond any peradventure. This salvation is as certain as the oath and promise of the eternal God can make it, doubt should therefore have no place in the heart of the believer. It belittles the work of Jesus and weakens Christian life.

In the next place the atonement opens the possibilities of salvation to all men, and leaves the whole world without excuse before God.

1st. The atonement makes the salvation of the believer a certainty. Christ has now become our priest. An *atonement* has been made for us. I feel sure that if the extent of Christ's sacrifice for the sinner were more fully realized by us there would be less darkness and spiritual death, and more life and joy in the Holy Ghost. The blemishes upon our lives, of which there are many, would not cast us down and cause us to feel that the foundations were removed, but looking out of ourselves to Him upon whom our sins were laid we would exclaim, 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure."

In a word the believer is not only pardoned by Jehovah in view of Christ's work, but he is *justified* by His blood. This is a higher blessing than pardon; it not only frees the sinner from the penalty due to transgression but fully restores him to the favor of God, securing to him the possession of his lost estate. A pardoned criminal, and a just man, who never committed any crime stand on very different ground. Now the Scriptures teach that believers occupy the high ground of sinless beings before God. All whom Jesus delivers from the wrath to come are freely justified from all things and presented faultless before the presence of God's glory. How then can the innocent be condemned? As Paul exclaims, "There is therefore *now* no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Our Lord assures us of our perfect safety through His work when He says, "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish." This view of the atonement must lead to the glory of God inasmuch as it ascribes the salvation of all men wholly to the work of our Redeemer. It gives no glory to man, but places the crown on the head of Him who gained the victory and lays the foundation for His eternal praise. Accordingly those who pass beyond this battle ground to the place of victory are represented as ascribing their happy condition to the work of Christ done for them. Not a word do they utter about their own good deeds, all is ascribed to the wonderful power of Jesus. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass having the harps of God, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, great and marvellous are Thy works Lord God Almighty, just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of Saints. Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy; for all nations shall come and worship before Thee, for Thy judgments are made manifest."

2nd. The atonement being universal in its application leaves all men without excuse: condemns the whole world and justifies God in all His ways. The Bible views the world as in a lost and helpless and hopeless condition. Paul's description of the Ephesians as they were when he first visited them, may be taken as a description of the whole world of unsaved sinners, from the Bible standpoint. He says of them, "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."

But they were not now in that sad state, their condition was changed. He adds, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." An attonement had been made for them; they had heard of it, accepted it and been saved by it. Upon belief in the application of the atonement to all men, Paul rested as he carried the good news out into the great world of lost and needy sinners; knowing that he had made an atonement for the world. The Master gave the great commission to His followers and sent them into all the world to offer salvation to every creature, and the Holy spirit closed the Book of Revelation with the words:

"The Spirit and the bride say come, and let him that heareth say come; and let him that is athrist come, and whosoever will let him take the water of life freely."

The sufficiency of the atonement to save all the race, if they accept it completely, vindicates the justice of God in condemning all who reject the gospel and leaves the whole world without excuse before Him. What more could Jehovah do than He has done? Will not the unsaved be speechless in that day? They surely will. This being the only sacrifice for sin are we not bound to make it known to the ends of the earth? Have we been as zealous as the case demands; have we urged our fellow-men to accept the good news as we should have done? If we appreciated the necessity of carrying this gospel to the perishing as we should more money would flow into the treasuries of our Boards, and more men would be consecrating their lives to the great work of preaching Christ. May the Holy Ghost inflame our zeal and deepen our faith in the all sufficiency of the atonement, is our prayer.

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