

DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH.

Chap. 5.

THE ATONEMENT.

The doctrine of the Church concerning the Atonement is thus expressed in her thirty-first Article,—‘The offering of Christ once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sins, but that alone.’ This doctrine, of all others most important for a Christian to know and believe to his soul’s health, is ever held up to our view throughout all the offices of our apostolic Church. Every prayer and collect closes with a petition to the Father, in the all-prevailing name of the Son. Now, without attempting to assign the reasons why God thought fit to redeem the world in this way, rather than in any other way, it is sufficient for man to know the express declarations of his own word, that Christ is ‘the way, the truth, and the life,’ and that ‘no man cometh to the Father but by him;’ neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name given under heaven, amongst men, whereby we must be saved.’ All this is clear enough, and this is all that immediately concern ourselves; nor is it consistent with the modesty and humility of a creature, to pry too curiously into those ‘secret things,’ which ‘belong only unto the Lord.’ The Gospel has not revealed the reasons of this amazing scheme, and probably they are far above our finite comprehension. An inspired Apostle terms it ‘the wisdom of God in a mystery,’—the mystery of godliness,—so profound and incomprehensible, that even ‘Angels desire to look into these things.’

The Scriptures plainly teach us that the only appointed method of salvation is through Jesus Christ. Take, for example, such expressions as the following, ‘Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures;—in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins;—the Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many;—my flesh which I will give for the life of the world;—this is my body, which is given for you;—I lay down my life for the sheep.’ With such passages as these, which meet our eyes on every page of the New Testament, is it not strange that any should be found, who daringly deny the atonement of Christ? Might not ‘presumption tremble for the application of that awful text, which denounces those who deny the Lord that bought them?’

The Scriptures further represent the extent of Christ’s atonement as universal and unlimited; extending back to the time when ‘sin first entered into the world and death by sin,’ and forward to the period, when ‘the last enemy,’ death itself, ‘shall be destroyed.’ If ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,’ and ‘all have sinned,’—if this doctrine is ‘worthy of being received by all men,’—it necessarily follows that the merits of his death extend to every individual of mankind. But there are numerous declarations of the universality of the atonement, as express and clear as language can make them. ‘He died for ALL;—He gave himself a ransom for ALL;—He tasteth death for EVERY MAN;—He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.’ The obvious meaning of all which expressions, is, that the whole of mankind, without exception, are placed in a condition of salvation. As certainly, therefore, as any man can say, ‘I am a sinner,’ just so certainly may he say, ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save me.’

Are we in doubt as to the efficacy of this atonement? We shall find by a recurrence to the same inspired volume, that it was as efficacious as it was extensive—that no crime is so aggravated but the blood of Christ can expiate it; none so dark and deep but the blood of the Lamb can wash it out;—‘for his blood cleanseth from all sin;’ and ‘though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ He tells us himself that he came ‘to seek and to save that which was lost;—that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance;—and invites ALL who are weary and heavy laden with the burden of their sins to come unto him. It follows, then, that every son of Adam,—every mortal

man,—is placed in a capacity of being saved; for ‘as’ committed against a Being of unspotted purity and by the offence of one,’ that is Adam, ‘judgment’ inflicts justice. Who, then, will mediate between came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the him, a guilty, rebellious sinner, and this all-just and righteousness of one,’ that is, Christ, ‘the free gift holy God?’ Shall he go to one of his fellow men? came upon all men unto justification of life.’

But then, all will not be saved, whom Christ came equally in need of an Intercessor and Redeemer? to save. Far far from it,—for we are told that ‘God our Saviour will have ALL MEN to be saved, and that doeth good no not one.’ Shall he then trust to come to the knowledge of the truth;—but all a mere man to intercede for him? Shall quite man will not comply with the terms of salvation. Not, make atonement for sin against an infinite Being? indeed, from any positive disability, not from any Reason answers no!—and revelation, in accordance with the plainest dictates of reason, tells us that irreversibly decreed, but on account of their stubborn and perverse hearts. Christ himself says to the ‘none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.’ Shall he look Jews, ‘Ye will not come to me, that he might have nor give to God a ransom for him.’ Shall he look life;—and to Jerusalem, “how often would I have to an angel for help? Alas! the God whom he has gathered thy children together, even as a hen gather- offended ‘chargeth his own angels with folly.’ He eth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.” can therefore place no reliance on any created arm; The consequence was, their city and nation were —but when he is told that God’s own arm has wrought given up to overwhelming ruin, which they brought salvation for him, that God was in Christ, recon- upon themselves by their own blindness and impeni- ciling the world unto HIMSELF, all his fears are at teney. Even, as St. Peter tells us, ‘denying the rest. The penitent can now calm the agitation of Lord that bought them,—that bought, and certain- his mind and tell himself that all is well. He can in ly would have saved them; but they refused his sal- this case, but in no other, repose with security on the vation, ‘and brought upon themselves swift destruc- atonement, as indeed full, perfect, and all-sufficient.’ tion.’

As surely, then, as the word of Jehovah is true,— which to build his hopes of salvation; he has now and ‘He is a God who cannot lie,—he hath no an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast,’ to which pleasure in the death of the wicked;’ he ‘will have he can always securely cling. He cannot doubt that all men to be saved,’ ‘not willing that any should a price, so infinitely precious, will be accepted; that perish, but that all should come to repentance.’ an intercession, so powerfully pleaded, will be heard. And in accordance with these gracious assurances, Thus important is the doctrine of our blessed Lord’s are all those exhortations to repentance, all those divinity, as an article of faith. So inseparably is it connected with the efficacy of his atonement, that declarations of pardon, all those promises, and all those threatenings, which are addressed to the hopes, and fears of all mankind, in almost every page of the Bible. In the blood of Jesus Christ ‘a fountain is opened for sin, and for uncleanness,’ which is abundantly efficacious to cleanse the most polluted soul, to make it white and spotless, even in the sight of a just and holy God, who ‘is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.’ To this exhaustless fountain and well-spring of eternal life, all are exhorted to come and freely drink; they are urged, by the kindest and most pressing entreaties, to taste of these spiritual waters, to purify and refresh the soul. ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.’ In like manner the beloved Apostle, in the most affectionate language, informs us, that ‘The Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.’

Intimately connected with the doctrine of the Atonement is that of the Divinity of Christ. Indeed, so far as human reason is permitted to look into this mysterious scheme, these two doctrines appear to be inseparable. But we are not left to the fallible judgment of human reason. The Scriptures expressly teach us that the Saviour of the world ‘was with God, and was God;—that he humbled himself, to visit this lower world, and ‘became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,’ that he might reconcile us to God, by satisfying the divine justice, which could not otherwise be appeased, and by making atonement for sin, by his own blood, when no other sacrifice would answer. ‘For it is not possible,’—such was the divine decree,—‘it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats,’—which were the appointed sacrifices under the law,—‘should take away sin; but here was a victim infinitely efficacious, whose blood cleanseth from all sin;—a Priest, who needed no atonement for himself, being ‘holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;—an Intercessor, all-prevailing, even the only and beloved Son of God, ‘in whom the Father is well pleased.’ Thus do the Scriptures not only refer the redemption of the world to the death of Christ, but they also ascribe the efficacy of his atonement to his proper divinity.

And how consolatory are these assurances to every humble penitent! The sinner, who feels the burden of his sins, looks around him with an anxious and inquiring eye for some one to remove this oppressive weight. But to whom shall he apply for relief? He realizes, with shame and sorrow, that he has been wayward and perverse from his youth; that to his natural depravity he has added numerous actual transgressions; and that every sin has been

committed against a Being of unspotted purity and by the offence of one,’ that is Adam, ‘judgment’ inflicts justice. Who, then, will mediate between came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the him, a guilty, rebellious sinner, and this all-just and righteousness of one,’ that is, Christ, ‘the free gift holy God?’ Shall he go to one of his fellow men? came upon all men unto justification of life.’

YOUTH’S DEPARTMENT.

THE SAILOR BOY AND HIS BIBLE.

I was born in America. My first desire was to be come a sailor. My parents were greatly opposed but my mother’s tears and my father’s earnest advice were unheeded. At the early age of twelve years I left my home, and made the wide swelling ocean my dwelling place. I can well remember the feeling with which I gazed for the last time upon the scene of my childhood. Ere I bade them all farewell I looked about for something which I could take with me, and which would remind me of my mother who had cherished me, when the blue waters rolled between us. Though ignorant of its real value, I took the Bible. I had been long at sea, and though I had stood in battle, face to face with the relentless enemy; and though I had seen the forked lightning and heard the thunder’s dreadful roar, yet had my life been spared. But one night, a violent storm arose. The sky was dark, and threatening and fierce was the tempest’s blast, as the fearful waves broke over the ship. When the morning sun arose I alone was left to witness the desolation of that fearful night.—The thought that I was alone—in that wrecked ship—upon the boundless fathomless deep—also—caused my heart to swell with mingled feelings of gratitude, anxiety and sorrow. I put into my pocket as much money as I could, for I found that I must leave the sinking vessel. My Bible, dear to me, because it had been the cherished treasure of my mother, I had always kept within the bosom of my jacket. Having prepared myself as well as I was able I committed myself to the waves, hoping to be able to swim to land. But the land was far distant. Finding myself burdened by the treasure I had about me, and supposing that I could best spare the Bible, I cast it from me. Yes, I threw from me the Bible, being sorry only because it had belonged to my mother.