

# Scripture Views of the Atonement.

## A SERMON.

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In discussing a subject like the one announced for to-night I shall not confine myself to any particular text, the subject is too wide for that. Not for exposition, therefore, but as a motto, we will take the eleventh verse of the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, "And not only so but we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the Atonement."

"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" were the words spoken to Moses on a memorable occasion when he stood in the immediate presence of Jehovah. We stand this evening in the presence of the grandest of all achievements as well as the most important of all truths. The atonement is the central truth of Christianity—the pivot on which it turns. Considered as a doctrinal system, the atonement is to Christianity what the key-stone is to the arch—the power which binds it together in one solid and symmetrical whole. Considered as a life, the atonement is to Christianity what the heart is to the human body—the fountain from whence it emanates and the motive power by which it acts.

Important, however, as this doctrine is, accurate conceptions of its nature are less frequent than we suppose. What is the atonement? is a question easier asked than answered. I see with pain that dreamy sentiment is to a large degree supplanting clear thought on this most vital question. It is present in the minds of the masses as a dogma to be believed in order to salvation, but there is little emphasis laid upon it as a doctrine founded on the fitness of things, and there is little effort made to grasp the

principles on which it is based or the methods by which it seeks its ends. This is equally a matter of solicitude and regret.

I am aware that when man has done his best there will be much in this doctrine that he does not and cannot understand. What, then, because we cannot reach the summit of this sunlit mountain, are we to remain forever in the fogs of indolent credulity? No! we are bound by the facts of our nature to aim to have intelligent reasons for our convictions and acts. If I am to trust my interest for time and eternity to the death of Christ, the question arises in my soul and I cannot crush it—*Why?*

I do not mean that the *rationale* of the atonement is necessary in order to salvation. That would exclude the salvation of infants, of idiots, and of all who have not come under the direct influence of Christian teaching; a conclusion equally repulsive to man as it is derogatory to the character of God. A man may be saved by a simple reliance on the fact of the atonement who is in utter ignorance of the reasons on which it rests. This arises from the fact that the atonement is not the reason for the sinner's faith, but for the exercise of God's mercy in saving. Notwithstanding all this, however, any man who has any care to be an intelligent Christian will, in the spirit of reverence and humility, try to ascertain from Scripture a solution of the questions which arise in his own bosom as he contemplates the death of Christ.—*Why? How? Wherefore?* These questions require close, consecutive, protracted thought, which God will reward by a good degree of clearness and certainty.

I am aware that we are often told that we must not theorize on this subject, but accept the fact as revealed in Scripture.

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