

In harmony with the psalmist's teaching, I. John 1:9 teaches that, when we confess our sins, God not only forgives our sins, but also cleanses us from unrighteousness. The last word signifies iniquity or guilt, and the clause means that he cleanses or frees us from guilt. Such cleansing is equivalent to acquittal. Hence, according to both Old and New Testament doctrine, it is the guilt of sin that is removed when God forgives us. Though our sins can never be undone, nor all their consequences ever overcome, when we turn from them to God, the Scriptures regard us as purged from guilt and freed from condemnation.

Each one should notice that it is God who is said to purge or put away transgression, and that he is said to do this of his own accord, when men confess to him. Freely and willingly, the Bible teaches, he forgives the guilt of sin. We may come to him with confidence, therefore, because the excellence of his character is pledged to pardon. His faithfulness and righteousness are guarantees, the apostle assures us. Similarly the author of Psalm 86:5 declares that the Lord Jehovah is good, and forgiving, that is, willing of himself to absolve from sin.

Thus, to the Biblical writers, divine atonement is the same as divine forgiveness. It is a spontaneous act of God, conditioned on a conscious act of man. Hence what the priest did in the Temple when atoning for the sins of the people was a symbolic act,