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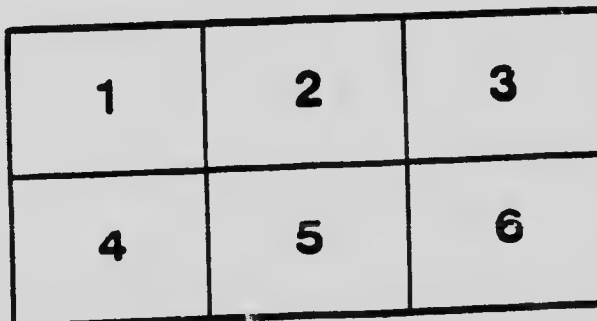
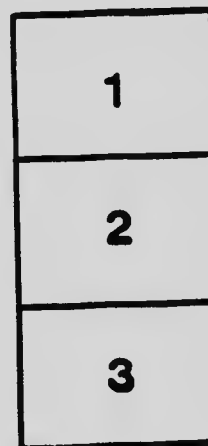
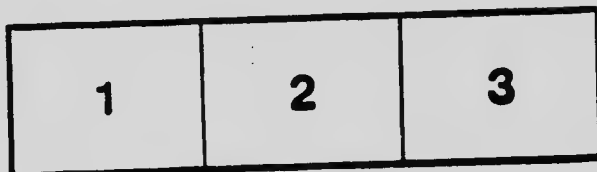
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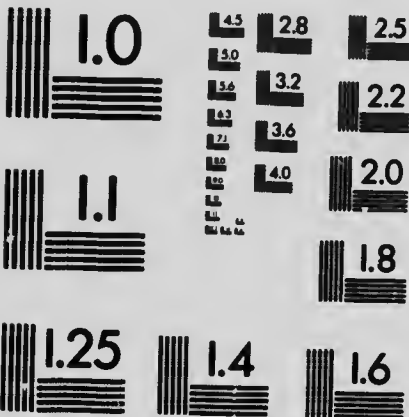
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AT ONEMENT  
OR  
RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

BY

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TO

PROFESSOR JOHN WILSON, M.A., LL.D.

*For more than forty years in his lifetime*

*An eminent Teacher of Greek and Latin in Victoria University*

*(Canada)*

**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
AS A TOKEN OF  
ADMIRATION AND VENERATION**





## PREFACE

**T**HIS is an inductive study of divine Reconciliation, based upon a critical interpretation of all the Biblical passages bearing on the question. The plan, as well as the analysis, is entirely new; and the method of treatment seems the only one by which the subject can be properly elucidated.

The title indicates the true nature, as well as the practical character, of the work. It is not Atonement, because that is an indefinite term; it is not the Atonement, because that is an ambiguous expression; nor is it the doctrine of the Atonement, because that is a theological phrase; but it is the doctrine of Reconciliation with God, as set forth in the Scriptures.

Long years ago I saw that the prepositions used in the Bible of the work of Christ, whether those referring to his death or those referring to his suffering, did not suggest the idea of substitution; but that, in every case, what Jesus is said to have done and suffered for us is said to have been done and suffered in our behalf and for our sake. Had that fact been recognized by the early theologians, the substitutionary theory of Atonement would

never have been constructed, because the writers of Scripture knew, as well as we, that nothing moral could be either substituted or transferred.

Many years since, too, I observed that theologians had given a pagan meaning to certain New Testament terms by going to heathen rather than Hebrew authorities, and I have been delighted to find that other Biblical students have noticed the same thing. Speaking recently in his correspondence column of the *British Weekly* with respect to the term propitiation, for instance, Professor David Smith, D.D., of the Presbyterian college, Londonderry, declared that, as it is commonly understood, the word conveys "a heathen idea." Throughout these pages I have shown how a heathen content has been given to several other terms.

The writers of the New Testament were sane men; and, though some of their ways of speaking were somewhat similar to those of their neighbours, their habits of thought were very different. Much of the language used by them, moreover, was both symbolic and figurative. Unscientific theologians have perverted what they taught respecting Reconciliation by taking their figurative language literally, and by misinterpreting their symbolic forms of speech. I have tried to rescue their teaching from misrepresentation by explaining Scripturally the symbols and figures which they employ.

The literature on the subject is very extensive,

and I have been reading and studying it all my life; but, as I was solely concerned with expounding the Scriptures, I have made almost no use whatever of it. Indeed, with the exception of an occasional sentence employed for the purpose of illustration, I have confined myself exclusively to my critical apparatus, having only in a general way referred to any technical treatise, ancient or modern, or quoted from any purely theological writer, living or dead.

In each chapter, I have sought merely to remove unscriptural ideas from the doctrine and to correct prevalent misconceptions concerning it; so that the work throughout, though critical, is uncontroversial. In short, it is both corrective and constructive on the basis of historical exegesis. Everything pertaining to the question has been deduced from the Scriptures and, so far as space permitted, demonstrated by them.

This is a book, therefore, for laymen as well as ministers. It is designed for all who wish to understand the richest practical subject in the Bible. I have tried to reduce the work to the smallest possible size, consistently with clearness and thoroughness. A few thoughts have been substantially repeated because of their great importance, and a few texts have been requoted because they have a particular significance in regard to different aspects of the doctrine.

It is well known to scholars that the word Christ is a title, not a proper name, and that in the gospels Jesus is described as the Messiah, or the Christ. But, since I regard Jesus of Nazareth as the spiritual Christ of God and the anointed Saviour of men, and since "Jesus Christ" and "Christ" are freely interchanged in the Pauline epistles, I have used Jesus and Christ interchangeably throughout this discussion.

I have been assured that people of all classes will be relieved to know that the work of Christ was necessary, not to appease the divine anger, nor to vindicate the divine honour, nor to satisfy the divine justice, but to bring men, through union with him, into a right relation with their Maker. For, while Reconciliation has both a Godward and a manward side, it is practically operative on men. In the mediatorial mission of Jesus the righteousness of God finds its supreme manifestation.

The volume is now given to the world as a modest contribution to constructive, or rather reconstructive, theology, and with the earnest hope that it may help, not only to relieve, but also to instruct, and may tend to establish faith, as well as dispel doubt.

G. C. W.

TORONTO, June, 1911.

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# AT ONEMENT

## I

### ATONEMENT IN ITSELF

**A**LL vital Christian doctrines have their roots in the Old Testament. That is owing to the genetic relation of the Old Testament to the New and the organic connection between them. Hence an inductive treatment of any doctrine requires a careful study of the germs contained in the Jewish Scriptures. But, at the outset, the meaning of the term atonement must be explained.

The English word is of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament; but, though it occurs once in the Authorized New Testament, it does not occur at all in the Revised. Those who made the Authorized Version translated the last noun in Romans 5: 11 "the atonement," which is a correct translation, if the noun be understood in its original sense; but, since the term is an ambiguous one, the makers of the New Revision removed the ambiguity by translating it "the reconciliation."

The reconciliation meant is that described in the



preceding verse, where the writer speaks of persons "being reconciled" to God through the death of his Son. So, according to New Testament teaching, atonement to God through Christ is reconciliation to God through Christ. Had the rendering of the Revisers been adopted from the beginning, the world would have become accustomed to their word; and, instead of speaking of the doctrine of atonement, we should have spoken of the doctrine of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

It is a well-known fact, however, that atonement signifies reconciliation or at-one-ment. The latter is an etymological definition, and one that gives an accurate signification. The term is composed of the two words, *at* and *one*, and the termination *ment*. The verb arose from the Middle English form of such phrases as "to be at one," meaning to agree or be reconciled, and "to set at one," meaning to make to agree or cause to be reconciled; and the noun was originally used to express the reconciliation of two estranged parties, especially the setting at one of God and man, who were previously at twain.

The root of the word for atonement in Hebrew means to cover, or to cover over; and, in the ritual of atonement, the idea expressed is that of covering sin so that it is figuratively hidden or removed from

<sup>1</sup>The Greek is *τὴν καταλλαγὴν*, and signifies a change from enmity to friendship.

the eyes of the divine Judge, and the worshipper is figuratively covered or protected from the effect of the divine displeasure. When used of God, the Hebrew verb is always figurative in sense, because he does not really cover anything; but, when used of man, it has a literal signification.

A good example of the literal use occurs in Genesis 32:20, where the English version makes Jacob say that he "will appease" Esau with a present, but where a literal translation would read, "I will cover his face with the present that goes before me." The covering of the face there is the offering of something to come before the face of the one offended that might remove an angry look from it. By giving him the present Jacob hoped to placate Esau, or secure his good-will, and thus induce him to condone the injury that had been done to him.

The Hebrew verb employed in this passage is the one that is generally used of the priest covering sin, in the sense of hiding it from God by means of a sacrifice, and is commonly rendered into English by the two words, "make atonement." But rightly to understand the Old Testament doctrine in relation to God, we must look carefully at the way in which the prophets and psalmists employ the verb from which the term atonement comes. Though many might be adduced, a few important passages will be sufficient for the purpose.

The author of Psalm 65:3 says that God will

“purge away” the transgressions of the people, and the author of Psalm 79:9 entreats him to “purge away” their sins. The verb employed in each case is the one from which the word atonement is derived, as well as the one which is generally used to express the notion of atonement; and it might consistently be rendered “make atonement,” for the thought intended is that of covering or cancelling transgressions so that those committing them may be shielded from the effects of the divine disfavour.

The figure of covering in this connection is equivalent to forgiving, and the verb in the original may be translated by the word forgive. It is actually so translated in Jeremiah 18:23, where the prophet, praying for the overthrow of his enemies, asks Jehovah to “forgive not their iniquity,” meaning that he should not cover or cancel their sin, as the parallelism proves; for the next clause of the verse reads, “Neither blot out their sins from thy sight.”

That which was supposed to be covered or cancelled was the guilt of sin. This is apparent from an expression in Psalm 32:5, where the author says that, when he resolved to confess his transgressions to Jehovah, he forgave “the iniquity” of his sin. The word for iniquity has there, as often elsewhere, the force of guilt; and the Hebrew would be better rendered, “Thou forgavest the guilt of my sin.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The word חַטָּאת, which signifies iniquity or guilt, is here used in Delitzsch's Hebrew New Testament.

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,

and was known to be a symbolic act by all intelligent Hebrew worshippers. It was simply an outward ceremony with which atonement or forgiveness was associated. It symbolized a reconciled relation between Jehovah and those who had fulfilled their lawful obligations to him.

The symbolism of the sacrifices on the great day of atonement, though very significant, is also very simple. The sprinkling upon the altar of the blood of a bullock, slain by the high priest as a sin offering for himself and his household, symbolized that Jehovah had graciously accepted their sacrifice, and forgiven their sins. "The life of the flesh is in the blood," Leviticus 17:11 teaches; and the blood was supposed to be an atonement, or a covering of sin, by the soul of the worshipper being voluntarily dedicated to God.

When the act of atoning for the priesthood was completed, the act of atoning for the people was commenced. Two goats were presented at the door of the tabernacle, and, since it was immaterial which one was selected, lots were cast to determine which of them should be slain. These animals were regarded as constituting but one offering, because each had its own part to bear in the solemnity. The one which was put to death indicated that the life of those present belonged thenceforth to God, and the one which was sent away indicated that their sins were thus removed from all connection with

the community. The latter was meant to teach them that, as they should not see it any more, so God would not remember their sins any more.

Forgiveness being an attribute of the Deity, atonement may be described as an objective provision in the divine mind; what Jesus did, too, in the days of his flesh by his life and teaching to reconcile men to God, may be described as an objective performance by him for us. In each of these senses we may regard atonement as an objective thing, or a thing existing apart from our experience of it; but in neither sense is the term regarded by any of the Biblical writers. By each of them it is viewed either as an act by which God reconciles man to himself or as the result of such an act.

Their way of regarding it coincides with the literal meaning of the English word. As the suffix *ment* denotes action or result, atonement is the act of bringing into agreement those that have been estranged, or the state of agreement into which those that have been estranged are brought. On its manward side, therefore, it is always a personal or subjective experience, though on its Godward side it is an objective provision, as is stated above.

For hundreds of years, however, atonement has generally been viewed by the Church in a very different way. Through being incorrectly viewed the word became a technical term among religious people. By Christian writers it is chiefly used in the

sense of something given to God, or something done for him, of such a character as to win his favour or forgiveness, the sacrificial work of Christ being especially and distinctively denoted by it. That use of the term, however, is not sanctioned by anything in the Bible. Though the work of Christ in the reconciliation of God and man may be called an atonement, because it is pre-eminently atoning in its effect, there is no authority in Scripture for so designating it, much less is there any authority for saying that sin was expiated by anything Jesus did.

All men admit that the English word, like the corresponding Greek word, signifies at-one-ment, though many justify the traditional use of it as a technical term. But who made it a technical term? It was not the evangelists; it was not the apostles; it was not the writers of Scripture; it was the theologians of a later age. Unscientific theologians are responsible for the arbitrary use of the term, which is as misleading as it is unscriptural. From that way of speaking and writing misconceptions have arisen, and, so long as that way of thinking obtains, misconceptions will continue to arise.

While, then, either the love of God or the work of Christ may be objectively considered an atonement, or a means of atonement, in its Scriptural application, as in its literal signification, the term denotes only action or result. It is the act of becoming reconciled to God or the state of being recon-

ciled to him. In other words, it is the act of getting or the state of being right with God. According to II. Corinthians 5: 18, 19, God reconciles men to himself through Christ. So, in the New Testament sense of the term, atonement is the act of becoming or the state of being reconciled to God through Christ.

It may here be added that, though the Scriptures do not represent the work of Christ as an atonement, Hebrews 2: 17 represents him as making "reconciliation" for the sins of his people. But the language of that passage is symbolic, being the same as that used of a Hebrew priest. This will be clearly shown in the chapter on atonement in Christ. His work was primarily one of revelation, and actually one of reconciliation and redemption; but the Biblical writers do not speak of it as having an independent existence by itself, much less do they speak of it as exerting an objective influence on God.

Because they are so frequently confounded the terms, atonement and redemption, should be differentiated. The difference between them has been stated in this way: Atonement is for sin; redemption is from sin. But that distinction, though it sounds Scriptural, is incorrect. It rests on the notion that atonement is an objective thing, and ignores the fact that the word translated "make atonement" is everywhere in Scripture a symbolic term. It ignores also another fact, namely, that



the sending away of the scapegoat, described in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, is only an object-lesson. The sins confessed over and so laid upon the scapegoat, were simply supposed to be borne away, and banished to a place removed from contact with the people.<sup>1</sup>

Atonement signifies at-one-ment; redemption signifies deliverance. Hence atonement suggests harmony, while redemption suggests recovery. The first means getting our relation right; the second means having our condition safe. A freezing man is atoned to the sun when he connects himself with its direct rays; he is redeemed by the sun when he is restored to comfort by it. In like manner, a person is atoned to God when he puts himself right with God, but he is redeemed by him when he is delivered by his power from sin.

Therefore, atonement expresses a relationship, whereas redemption expresses a state. The one is a personal relation, the other is a personal condition. The former implies a surrender of self to the will of God; the latter implies a control of self by the grace of God. Atonement is equivalent to reconciliation, and redemption is equivalent to salvation. Consistently with this explanation, the author of Romans speaks in chapter 3:24 of redemption in Christ, but in chapter 5:11 of reconciliation through Christ. So it is wrong to use the one term for

<sup>1</sup>See Oehler's "Old Testament Theology," Am. ed., p. 313.

the other, as if there were no difference between them.

Regeneration and atonement should also be differentiated. Viewing the former as a divine quickening, it begins with the prompting of the Spirit to get right with God, whereas the latter is the act of getting or the state of being right with him. Hence, the one is related to the other as the means to the end, or the cause to the effect, and the one leads naturally, or should lead naturally, to the other.

Both regeneration and atonement are very vital doctrines, and both are equally important doctrines, but their true relation is not generally understood. As conscious acts, the former is preliminary to the latter; but, as conscious states, they result in the same experience, and a reconciled life is a regenerated life. Atonement, like regeneration, therefore, is a doctrine in which all men should be interested, because it is one with which they are all concerned.

Since atonement is the setting at one of those who have been estranged, namely, God and man, it is a very simple, as well as a very practical, doctrine. And yet it has long been regarded as a very mysterious one. Many have contended that it is a mystery, the depth of which we cannot fathom. Such a contention is based on the belief that divine atonement is a transaction extending back into the eternities between God and Christ, a transaction in which humanity had neither part nor lot. There is no

foundation in Scripture, however, for that belief. On the contrary, it is both unscriptural and unreasonable. A sinner is not saved by any proceeding in which he does not personally participate.

Human salvation is in accordance with an eternal divine purpose—a purpose which not only runs through all the ages, but also finds its perfect accomplishment in the redemptive work of Christ; but the redemption that is in him is a practical, not a mechanical, matter. When man complies with the conditions of forgiveness then, and only then, is he freed from condemnation. Hence, though atonement is not a mysterious transaction between God and Christ, it is a personal transaction between man and his Maker through union with Christ, or through union with the spirit of life which is in him. But, being a personal matter, there is no more mystery about at-one-ment between man and God than there is between man and man. Indeed, if God is a loving Father, then at-one-ment between him and man must be as natural as that between a parent and a child.

The doctrine of atonement is also a very comprehensive one. As God is the creator of all men, he must have an equal interest in all men and an equal desire for their welfare. In other words, he must have the same purpose of grace towards them all. The Scriptures are most explicit on this point. The excellence of his character is pledged to pardon, we

have seen, and he forgives freely, and of his own accord.

Had their teaching not been ignored by theologians, and their meaning obscured by controversialists, we should never have heard of such a thing as limited atonement, nor would such a notion as particular redemption ever have been entertained. The very thought of particularism, on the part of a perfect Being, is unworthy. A perfect Being is impartial, and an impartial Being does not confine his favours to a few. As the Saviour of all who believe, his readiness to save extends to all who will believe. Atonement is conditional, but unlimited. The provision for it is boundless, as boundless as the love of God, and, therefore, as universal as the human race.

As there is no such thing as limited atonement, so there is no such thing as unconditional atonement. All men are reconciled on condition of being free from guilt or freed from condemnation. The boundless provision in God is for all men, so that all, upon conditions varying with their state and circumstances, may share in the benefit of it. The fundamental condition, however, is the same for every one; for, as we are told in Acts 10: 34, "God is no respecter of persons." He treats men in accordance with their inward character, and regards with equal favour all who conform to his will, so far as they apprehend it.

It is, therefore, incorrect to speak of any unconditional benefits of atonement. That is to say, there are no unconditional benefits of a saving kind. There are unconditional benefits flowing from the work of Christ, benefits both moral and social; but the benefits of atonement are conditioned, as has been explained. So, when it is said that, by virtue of the unconditional benefits of the atonement, children are heirs of the kingdom of God, it is true in the sense that provision exists in the divine character for receiving graciously the souls of all who die in the innocence of infancy.

Moreover, atonement is not simply boundless in its provision, but unceasing in its operation. There is nothing exceptional or unnatural about it. Light is always active, and so is divine love. God is always working on the spirits of men, and some of them are yielding to him all the time, so that atonement is a constant process; and, as this working will continue so long as man endures, it is likewise a perpetual process. Inasmuch as the operation of divine love is continuous and eternal, we may say that atonement is continuous and eternal, too.

Those, therefore, who speak of the finished work of Christ, ignore or overlook this fact. When Jesus uttered his expiring cry, his work of revelation and redemption was accomplished. He had then finished the work he was given to do in person on the earth. But he has since been working by his spirit and

through his principles, and in this way he will never cease to exert an influence on men; so that his work will not be finished as long as a single soul remains to be reconciled to God through his instrumentality.

Atonement is generally considered a central doctrine in theology, and it may be justly so considered. The foregoing observations show us plainly that it is both a central one in Scripture and a vital one in experience. Getting right with God is necessary to being right with self, and that is necessary to being right with others. To get right, and keep right with him, is the very essence of religion, and the true secret of life.

It should now be clear to every one that atonement is partly objective in the character of God, and partly subjective in the soul of man. As a divine provision, it is something objective; but, as a human experience it is something subjective. So far as man is concerned, however, it is a purely subjective experience. Being the work of God in bringing man into harmony with him, when he is ready to yield to his will, atonement is the result of a joint action; and in each case of forgiveness the two acts, man's submitting and God's remitting act, are combined.

Hence, instead of viewing it as a doctrine difficult to explain, we should view it as one quite easy of explanation; and instead of thinking that no human formula can adequately express it, we should be prepared to see that atonement is merely the

reconciliation of God and man. It implies a change in their personal relations, and, for that reason, it is the reconciliation of God with man, no less than that of man with God, though not exactly in the same sense, as will afterwards be shown.

The two chief factors in atonement are thus God and man. Those are the indispensable factors, one might say. But, owing to his unique relation to both God and man, Christ has become a third. These may be called the essential Christian elements of atonement—God being the author, Christ the mediator, and man the receiver. Besides these three, however, as set forth in Scripture, there are several subordinate elements, or several means by which atonement is effected, such as sacrifice, death, suffering, and service.

Up to the present, scholars have failed to analyze the Bible with sufficient care to resolve the doctrine into its elements. As a consequence, treatises on atonement have been too much characterized by repetitions and cross-divisions. Each of the elements mentioned has its purpose and its place in Scripture, and each possesses a significance of its own. All of them, moreover, have been operative in past ages, others of them are still operative, and will continue to operate—some in one way and some in another—till the end of time.

Adopting the above analysis, we have seven Biblical aspects to consider; and, since philosophy has

played a conspicuous part in the interpretation of the doctrine, we have one philosophical aspect to consider, also. The Biblical aspects are all practical, but the philosophical aspect is speculative. Each aspect calls for a special discussion, and each will require a separate chapter. In certain cases, too, a pretty full treatment must be given, and a fairly long chapter will be required. An endeavour will be made to let the Scriptures speak, so far as possible, for themselves; and what is said of each phase of the subject will be rather suggestive than exhaustive.

Wherever necessary, an element will be traced right through the Bible, in order to evince its Scriptural import; and in every case the peculiar significance of an element will be definitely described. That is to say, it will be shown that atonement in God is initiative, atonement in Christ mediative, atonement in man experimentative, atonement in sacrifice figurative, atonement in death consecrative, atonement in suffering participative, atonement in service ministrative, atonement in theory speculative.

It is mainly owing to speculation that the meaning of atonement has been so strangely misconceived. The great trouble has been that, instead of seeking to ascertain what the Scriptures teach, men have sought to explain the doctrine by constructing theories about it. But for theorizing with respect to it, they would never have been led to sup-



pose that a purely experimental doctrine was an unfathomable mystery.

Besides those which have resulted from theories based on an arbitrary use of atonement as a technical term, misconceptions have arisen from arraying one divine attribute against another, as in suggesting that God's justice had to be satisfied in order that his mercy or love might operate. It has often been stated, for instance, that divine justice demands the condemnation of the sinner, while divine mercy calls for his deliverance, as if justice and mercy in God were opposed to each other. All essential attributes meet together in him, and he acts, not according to one of them at one time, and another of them at another time, but in conformity with all of them at all times.

Another class of misconceptions has arisen from supposing that God suffered in the work of atonement, that is, with Jesus on the Cross. But that supposition is erroneous. An infinite Being cannot suffer, because suffering implies limitation. God sympathizes as only a divine Being can sympathize, but he does not suffer. Such a notion is inconceivable to most thoughtful writers, and to the present writer it is unthinkable. The Scriptures tell us that he sympathizes with us in our troubles and afflictions, and that he compassionates us when we turn from sin to righteousness; but more than that they do not teach, nor warrant us in teaching.

Then misconceptions have arisen from a misunderstanding of the language employed by the Biblical writers. Many of their terms have not the force in Scripture which they have long been thought to have. A heathen content has been given, and is still being given, to several of them. Such words as "sacrifice," "propitiation," "ransom," and "redemption," are figurative terms when used in the Bible with respect to God. Their figurative character will appear when we come to deal with the passages in which they occur.

The numerous misconceptions render a new investigation necessary, one might almost say, imperative; for the subject cannot be clarified by theorizing over it. No theory—sacrificial, judicial, or ethical—can ever free from obscurity that which is solely a matter of experience. The only proper method is the one that has been suggested, namely, to consider each element in Scripture by itself, and then show both its particular bearing on the doctrine and its practical relation to human life.

On the authority of Jesus, God is our Father; so that we should think and speak of him, in terms of fatherhood, for all words used in reference to forgiveness have a paternal significance. Hence, in our discussion of the doctrine of atonement, when speaking of his dealings with us, paternal thoughts should occupy our minds; and, when speaking of our relations with him, filial ideas should be substituted

for forensic ideas and filial language should take the place of legal phraseology.

In order to prepare the reader fully for what follows, the character of another class of words—anger, wrath, displeasure—should be briefly described. These each express a violent feeling, or a state of mental agitation; and, as such a feeling cannot exist in the Divine Being, it can be ascribed to him only in a figurative way. To speak with Wesley in his comment on Romans 5:9, "Wrath in man, and so love in man, is a human passion. But wrath in God is not a human passion; nor is love, as it is in God. Therefore the inspired writers ascribe both the one and the other to God only in an analogical sense."

Love in God is his Spirit operating for us, and wrath in him is his Spirit operating against us. The antagonistic operation is that which we bring upon ourselves in the form of a penalty of some kind. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," the author of I. John 1:5 declares. He declares also that "God is love," and, we may add consistently, in him is no displeasure at all. When we walk in the light as he is in the light, we are in harmony with him; but, when we walk in moral darkness, we are out of harmony with him.

Hence his antagonism is something that we incur by acting out of harmony with his will. In other words, it is simply the judicial discipline that fol-

lows an act of transgression, or the natural penalty that comes from the violation of law. Divine anger is only holy hostility or holy indignation. The Biblical writers saw this fact as clearly as our modern poets, one of whom, Dr. Walter Smith, has sweetly and Scripturally said,

“There is no wrath to be appeased  
In heaven above;  
No wrath with bitter anguish pleased,  
For God is love.”

## II

### ATONEMENT IN GOD

**A**S the author of atonement, God is the first factor to be considered. He is not simply its primal element, but its originating cause; so that fundamentally he himself is our atonement. It has always existed in his character, and he has always been exerting an atoning influence on man. In the Scriptures there is no limit to his readiness to forgive or to his willingness to save.

All through the Bible he is represented as both gracious and forgiving, grace and goodness being viewed as his essential attributes. That God is love and that redemption is the outcome of his love, is the dominant note of the New Testament; and his gracious character is as conspicuously portrayed in the Old Testament as in the New. Only a few significant epithets need be mentioned, though a number of others might be.

In Psalm 86: 5, we have seen, he is described as "good and ready to forgive." In Nehemiah 9: 17, he is described as "ready to pardon"; in Numbers 14: 18, as "plenteous in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression"; in Exodus 34: 7, as "keeping

mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"; in Exodus 34:6, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:8, as "full of compassion and gracious"; in Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 145:8, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, as "gracious and full of compassion." The ancient Scriptures abound in similar expressions of the divine goodness and graciousness. One passage more, because of its comprehensive conception of the divine compassion, may be quoted, namely, Psalm 145:9—"Jehovah is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

All through the Bible, too, he is represented as taking the initiative in the work of saving men. On this point, John 3:16—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life"—is so explicit that no other New Testament passage requires to be quoted, though no less explicit is I. John 4:9—"Herein was the love of God manifested in us (in our case), that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

There are also several passages in the Old Testament almost equally expressive of spontaneous divine regard. Ezekiel 33:11 represents Jehovah as saying with respect to Israel, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"; and Isaiah 59:16 says that, when Jehovah saw that there was no one to inter-

pose on behalf of Israel, "his own arm brought salvation." But Isaiah 45: 22 makes Jehovah say with reference to the world at large, "Look (literally, turn) unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

Though less is naturally said by the prophets about the love of God for the heathen than about his love for the Israelites, chapters 42-49 of Isaiah show that the latter are viewed by the prophet as the Servant of Jehovah, because they are commissioned by him to give his law, or his religion,<sup>1</sup> to the nations, that his "salvation may be unto the end of the earth"<sup>2</sup> and the book of Jonah, especially in chapters 3: 10; 4: 11, show that God was conceived by the author as being moved with pity towards all who abandon their evil way and turn from it to him. The thought expressed in those verses respecting the impartial favour of God resembles closely that expressed in Acts 10: 35, "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." Each writer presents a similar conception of the universality of the divine love, and the comprehensiveness of the divine purpose.

Then, throughout the Scriptures, God is represented as forgiving men spontaneously when they

<sup>1</sup>The word translated "judgment" in the English versions of chapter 42: 2 means there the religion of Jehovah regarded in its moral aspect as a system of practical ordinances.

<sup>2</sup>So the original of chapter 49: 6 is correctly rendered in the margin of the Revised Version.

confess to him their sins. In this particular, also, the teaching of Christ and his apostles is so definite that only one New Testament passage requires to be quoted, and that is I. John 1:9—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." With the doctrine of this apostle agrees that of the Hebrew prophets, especially the author of Isaiah 55:7, who says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

The prophet of the Exile is most emphatic in regard to the spontaneousness of divine forgiveness. In chapter 43:25, speaking for Jehovah with respect to Israel, he says, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake"; in chapter 44:22, speaking in the same way, he says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins"; in chapter 48:9, speaking still in the same way, he says, "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." In like manner, the author of Psalm 25:11 entreats Jehovah for his "name's sake" to pardon his iniquity; and the author of Psalm 79:9 entreats God to purge away the people's sins for his "name's sake."

In the Bible the name of God stands for God him-



self, or his character and attributes, as revealed and manifested. Ezekiel speaks repeatedly of Jehovah as having done something for his name's sake,<sup>1</sup> that is, for his character's sake; and our Lord taught his disciples to pray that the name of God might be hallowed,<sup>2</sup> that is, that his character might be revered and reproduced. For God to do anything for his name's sake, therefore, is the same as to do it for his own sake. So the psalmists mentioned pray that Jehovah would, for the sake of the excellence of his character, forgive iniquity and sin. By the Old no less than by the New Testament writers, forgiveness was seen to be an essential attribute of the divine personality.

But, besides the passages that prove the spontaneousness of forgiveness as a free act of God, there are two that represent him as making advances towards reconciliation, and there is one that represents him as graciously anticipating the act of confession. Isaiah 65: 1 makes him say respecting the Jews, as Romans 10: 20 makes him say respecting the Gentiles, to give a literal rendering of the Hebrew, "I was to be consulted by those who asked (me) not, I was to be found by those who sought me not";<sup>3</sup> and Luke 15: 20 describes him by means

<sup>1</sup>Chapter 20: 9, 14, 22, 44, and often elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 6: 9; Luke 11: 2.

<sup>3</sup>The first verb in each of these clauses is a reflexive, so that the one signifies, "I let myself be consulted," and the other,

of a parable as moved with compassion for the penitent prodigal, and as going forth to meet him while he was still a long way off. The God of the Bible seeks his children as a faithful shepherd seeks his sheep.

Such is the general tenor of the teaching of Scripture on this important subject. God is not merely willing to be reconciled, but desirous of reconciliation, and is doing all he can by every possible means to reconcile men to him. For what he is in himself, not in return for anything he has received, he offers freely to forgive their sins. The prophets, like the apostles, found the attribute of forgiveness in the character of God; for both prophets and apostles teach that he forgives men when they turn from sin to righteousness, gratuitously, because of his compassionating love.

As the Infinite and Eternal One, he must possess the attribute of reconciliation. Atonement is inherent in humanity, and hence belongs inherently to Divinity. If the Deity were unwilling to be reconciled, he would not be a benevolent, much less a perfect, Being. Were the Scriptures silent with respect to his atoning love, it would be necessary to postulate the existence of such an attribute; for a moral creator is under an obligation to deal kindly

“I let myself be found.” The thought is that he made overtures which were rejected. He was ready to hear and answer, but the people were unwilling to supplicate.

with his creatures and care for them in every possible way. But everywhere they represent him as both possessing and manifesting it, by his interest in all, his mercy towards all, and his regard for all.

The author of the one hundred and thirtieth Psalm makes the fact that God forgives spontaneously, the primary reason for reverencing him; for in the fourth verse, after showing that no one could stand before him, were Jehovah to mark iniquities, he adds encouragingly, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared." A more literal rendering of the verse would read, "With thee is *the* forgiveness, in order that thou mayest be revered"; and the meaning is that with Jehovah is the forgiveness that all men need, to the intent that he may be revered, because they can truly reverence only a gracious and forgiving God.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the psalmist just mentioned not only makes the fact that God forgives freely the primary reason for reverencing him, but also makes the fact that he saves graciously the fundamental ground of trusting him. In the closing verses of the Psalm, he exhorts the people to look to him with confident expectation for both pardon and deliverance. "O Israel, hope in Jehovah," he says, "for with Jehovah

<sup>1</sup>In the mind of the psalmist forgiveness involved the removal of temporal punishment, and he suggests that the sight of what Jehovah would do for Israel might influence others to worship him.

there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption; and he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.”

According to the Scriptures, therefore, nothing is needed to enable God to pardon sin. That is to say, nothing external is required to render him propitious. Nothing external has to be given, nothing objective has to be done, to make him either able or willing to forgive. Of course, as has already been observed, if his willingness is to issue in reconciliation between him and the sinner, the latter must abandon his evil way, and turn from sin to righteousness. Man must repent and amend his conduct, in order to get right with God, but nothing further is demanded of him. Nor is there anything more that he could do, except to make restitution, as far as he can.

Some persons, however, may feel perplexed over the offering of external objects, concerning which so much is said in some parts of the Old Testament. What does that fact imply? it may be asked. As their significance is set forth in a later chapter, it is not necessary to say much about the matter here. In the proper place it will be shown that formal sacrifice is not a divine institution, and that God has not at any time commanded it. Though material offerings are enjoined in some portions of the Pentateuch, they are enjoined as parts of a religious ritual, not in consequence of a command from God. Sac-

rifice originated in a human instinct; and it expressed a feeling of dependence on the part of man towards powers in nature capable, as he believed, of helping or harming him.

There was, doubtless, a period when, in common with the other nations of antiquity, the Hebrews believed that God desired oblations, and the bulk of the people may have thought that he was pleased with them; but there is nothing in the Scriptures to show that the Biblical writers supposed that he had ever commanded them. Throughout the Bible the chief stress is laid on spiritual sacrifices, or offerings of thanksgiving and praise. By the great prophets and psalmists ritual offerings were not regarded with approval, except when they expressed a right state of the heart; and by some of the latter it is explicitly declared that God did not desire, much less require, them.

The author of Psalm 40:6, for instance, says that, having endowed men with a faculty of understanding, God has no delight in sacrifice and offering, and that he has not required burnt offering and sin offering, and teaches that true service consists in obedience to the divine will, not in ceremonial rites of any kind; and the author of Psalm 51:17 says that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart, meaning that he desires not the offering of material objects, but the devotion of the heart. By all the leading writers of Scripture the

disposition of the heart was seen to be the essential thing with God. This is, perhaps, the best connection to observe that the specific sin offering is mentioned but once in the books of the Psalms. It occurs in the former of the two verses just paraphrased, and there it is mentioned only to state that such an offering is not desired.

Some persons, also, may feel like asking how the word "propitiation," which occupies so prominent a place in theology, is to be explained. In reply it should be stated that the term is never used in our translation of the Old Testament. The word for the lid of the ark, which is rendered "mercy-seat" in our English Bibles,<sup>1</sup> is sometimes translated "propitiatory,"<sup>2</sup> because the idea of propitiation was associated with the lid of the ark; but, though the name propitiatory may possibly have come from the notion of placating the Deity at the Kapporeth, as the covering of the ark was called, it is a purely symbolic term, as the rendering "mercy-seat" implies.

To the Kapporeth, or covering of the ark, was specially attached the manifestation of the divine presence, so that it was simply the place where the divine mercy was supposed to be dispensed through

<sup>1</sup>Exodus 25:17; 37:6, 8, 9; Leviticus 16:2; Numbers 7:89.

<sup>2</sup>The name has also been given by theologians, though not by translators, to those offerings which were once thought to be grateful to the Deity, and capable of procuring his aid and blessing.

the medium of the high priest. It served as an instrument of atonement, or a means of effecting reconciliation, and was so understood by both priest and people. It was so understood by the former from a very ancient time, and by the latter in later times, at least. It signified that God was willing to be reconciled, and symbolized the grace of pardon by which he provided a covering, that is, an atonement, for the people's sins. Let no one lose sight of the fact that to say he forgives sin is the same as to say he makes atonement for it.

Throughout the Old Testament sacrifice has only a symbolic significance, and the offering of atonement is viewed merely as a symbol of reconciliation and communion between man and God. On the great day of atonement a special offering was made to cover symbolically such elements of sin as might not have been purged by the ordinary services. The act of laying the sins of the people on the head of the scapegoat was also a symbolic act, as was stated in the previous chapter. The whole proceeding was an object-lesson. The goat, laden symbolically with sins, and sent hastily away by itself, was intended to teach those present that they might regard themselves as favourably accepted, and their sins as graciously forgiven.

In the popular belief, a belief that may have lingered till the period of the Captivity, the favour of Jehovah could be bought with gifts, and his anger

averted by offerings; but the enlightened leaders in Israel taught that such was not the case. From the time of the Exile, if not much earlier, the representative teachers taught that God need not, and could not, be propitiated. They regarded ritual offerings as only symbolic expressions of a certain state of heart, and inveighed against sacrifices as such, when dealing with those sufficiently developed to do without the symbol. So whatever the people in general may have thought about obtaining divine favours by means of sacrifice, their leaders and teachers knew that no divine favour could be obtained in that way. So far as the record shows, they all proclaimed the unreasonableness of thinking otherwise.

In the New Testament the word propitiation occurs three times—once in Romans 3:25, once in I. John 2:2, and once also in I. John 4:10; but in each place it is applied to Christ himself, and not to his work. That is to say, it is used not to teach that God was rendered propitious by anything Jesus did, but to show that he is propitious in himself—so propitious, indeed, that he gave us Christ as a proof of his righteous and loving character. Since a full exposition of these passages is given in the following chapter, it is sufficient here to observe that neither writer states that Christ made propitiation, but that he is a propitiation, which means, as will be shown, that he is a symbol of propitiation, or a



practical expression of divine righteousness and love.

There is another New Testament passage that should now be briefly considered, because it is wrongly translated in the New Revision. Speaking of Jesus in chapter 2:17, the author of Hebrews says that it behoved him to be made like his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, "to make propitiation for the sins of the people." So the Revisers have rendered the last clause of the verse, but the rendering is rather a heathen than a Hebrew one. By heathen writers the verb in Greek is perpetually applied to their deities, with the meaning "to make propitious" or "to appease displeasure," but it is not thus applied to God by any Biblical writer.

The translation given in the Revised version, therefore, is unscriptural, whereas that given in the Authorized version, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," is both Scriptural and correct. This assertion is proved by Psalms 65:3; 78:38; 79:9, where the same verb occurs in the Septuagint, and where both it and the corresponding verb in Hebrew are consistently rendered in our English Bibles "forgive" or "purge away." The reader will recollect that the Hebrew verb employed is one from which the term atonement is derived, and should bear in mind that in each Psalm it means

to make atonement or reconciliation as truly as it means to pardon or forgive.

The only other place in the New Testament where the verb in Greek occurs is Luke 18: 13, and there the publican is represented as saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." To be merciful to him meant to be favourably disposed towards him, that is, to be gracious to him and forgive his sins.<sup>1</sup> He assumed that God was willing to be reconciled and ready to forgive. Hence the rendering of Hebrews 2: 17 in the Authorized version is strictly in accord with Old Testament usage, and that is what should guide us in translating the passage.<sup>2</sup> The apostle does not say that Christ propitiated God, but simply states that he was peculiarly qualified for the priestly work of making atonement for the people's sins. His priestly work, like that of the ordinary high priest, was purely symbolic, of course. It is not necessary to say more on this point here.

Some persons, again, may ask how such terms as "redeem," "redemption," and "ransom," should be understood when they are used of God. They are then used tropically or figuratively, as may

<sup>1</sup>The verb in classic Greek implies reconciliation through an external offering, but the only offering God requires, as each of the evangelists was aware, is the sacrifice of the heart.

<sup>2</sup>In the study of Biblical terms we should always be guided by Hebrew usage, for following heathen usage is misleading; and, so long as men follow heathen usage with respect to sacrificial language, so long they will be led astray.

readily be shown. The primary meaning of redeem is to buy back, that is, to recover or rescue by paying a price; and the term has both a literal and a figurative signification. It is used literally of men, whenever a price is actually paid; but it is always used figuratively of God, because we cannot give him anything, nor does he desire anything, but our hearts. For instance, in Exodus 6:6 Moses represents Jehovah as assuring the Israelites that he will "redeem" them, that is, deliver them from bondage; in Isaiah 43:1 the speaker represents Jehovah as exhorting Israel not to fear because he has "redeemed" him, that is, delivered him from banishment; in Psalm 25:22 the speaker beseeches God to "redeem" Israel out of his troubles, that is, to deliver him from distresses; in Psalm 71:23 the speaker praises God, because he has "redeemed" his soul, that is, delivered him from danger or destruction; and in Psalm 130:8 the speaker declares that Jehovah will redeem Israel from his iniquities, that is, from sin and its consequences.

The word "redemption," likewise, is a figurative term when used of God. It is one of the figures in Scripture under which deliverance from sin is expressed. But, under that figure, various kinds of divine deliverance are mentioned, and always without any thought of a price being paid. The author of Psalm 111:9 describes God as having sent "redemption" to his people, meaning deliverance from

bondage or banishment; the author of Psalm 130:7 exhorts Israel to hope in Jehovah, because with him is "plenteous redemption," meaning willingness and ability to effect deliverance; in chapter 1:68 Luke represents Zacharias as blessing God for having wrought "redemption" for his people, meaning deliverance from political enemies through the agency of his Messiah; and in Romans 3:24 the apostle describes God as justifying men freely by his grace through "the redemption" which is in Christ Jesus, meaning the deliverance from spiritual enemies which comes from personal union with him. Furthermore, in Luke 21:28, and often elsewhere in Scripture, the term is used to denote simple deliverance of any kind and by any appropriate means.

The word "ransom," which is a doublet of redemption, may be either a noun or a verb. As a substantive, it is found once in connection with the Deity, and that is in Isaiah 43:3. There he is said to have given Egypt as a "ransom" for the release of Israel, and the meaning is that Egypt was a providential compensation to the Persian conquerors for the emancipation of the Hebrew exiles. As a verb, the word occurs in connection with Jehovah twice in the Authorized and several times in the Revised version; but it is not necessary to name the passages, because in each of them "ransom" is used in the sense of redeem, and the latter might always be substituted for it.

The foregoing examples suffice to show the tropical character of these terms. Nothing was supposed to be given to God in any of those cases, but in every case he is conceived as acting solely of his own accord. When he is said to redeem or ransom, it is equivalent to saying that he rescues or delivers, whether it be from bondage or banishment, from trouble or danger, or from sin and its effects. God redeems men, as he forgives them, on the ground of his compassionating love. A good illustration of this fact from Scripture is found in Isaiah 52:3, where the speaker represents Jehovah as saying to the exiles, "Ye were sold for nought, and ye shall be redeemed without money." As he received nothing for letting them go into captivity, so he expected nothing for bringing them out of it, is the thought. No price was paid, or could be paid, in either transaction; and the Biblical writers were as intelligent in this respect as we are.

God is represented in the Scriptures as a Redeemer, not because his deliverance was purchased by the payment of anything, but because of his spontaneous interest in men and his inherent love for them. Addressing in Jehovah's name all who would listen to him, the author of Isaiah 55:1 says, "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 meat without money, and without price." It was his knowledge of human

want and his sympathy with human weakness, the prophet teaches, that prompted God to offer freely the blessings typified by the language employed. On condition of obedience, those who accept the invitation are promised complete satisfaction for all spiritual need, through membership in his kingdom and participation in its benefits.

Moreover, according to I. Timothy 2:4, God is not simply the Saviour of all men, but his will is that all men should be saved through a full acquaintance with saving truth. There, also, it is his interest in men and his sympathy with them, in one word, his loving-kindness towards them, that is given as the reason for his gracious desire. With that teaching agrees Titus 2:11, where we are taught that the grace or loving-kindness of God is the sole means of salvation to all men. Both verses teach that he not only takes the initiative in our redemption, but also makes the fullest provision for it.

Then II. Timothy 1:9 states expressly, to paraphrase the passage, that it is God who saves men by his power, not according to their works—that is, not as a reward for anything that they do—but according to his own purpose and grace, or his own gracious purpose. And, again, with great explicitness, Titus 3:4, 5 declare, to translate freely, that when the kindness of God, our Saviour, and his love for man were revealed in the person of Christ,

he saved us, not as the result of any works of a righteous nature that we had done, but in conformity to his own merciful purpose.<sup>1</sup> Here, also, our salvation is definitely ascribed to the fact that forgiveness is a divine attribute.

Thus, throughout both Testaments, God is represented as a Being who forgives freely and saves graciously all who put their trust in him. The prophets and psalmists, as well as the evangelists and apostles, teach that reconciliation or atonement originates with him. The former, no less than the latter, saw that it was an essential element of his character. And it is not simply an essential element of his character, but the primal attribute of his personality.

Yet, notwithstanding the plainness of the Scriptures on this point, theologians have long taught, and are still teaching, that an external influence was necessary either to render him propitious, or to enable him to pardon—some holding that the work of Christ is the ground of forgiveness, some holding that his death is the ground on which sins are remitted, and some holding that his unmerited suffering is the ground on which unmerited pardon is bestowed. In one form or another this view is dominant to-day, and it has been regarded as evangelical throughout the Christian Church for many centuries.

<sup>1</sup>In each of these passages repentance and faith are presupposed, of course.

But such teaching is contrary to the testimony of the Bible. It is quite unbiblical to make anything other than divine grace an objective ground of forgiveness. The objective ground of forgiveness is the character of God, and, were it not, the outlook for the sinner would be dark, indeed. A God of love needs nothing to make him loving, and the Being who gave his only begotten Son to the world because he loved the world, needs no objective ground to enable him to pardon. If he were not willing of himself to pardon, we could not make him willing; and, if forgiveness were not an attribute of his character, no one could put it there. His love, however, is the beginning and the end of atonement; and forgiveness is bestowed on man, not by reason of anything done for him by another, but in consequence of his repentance and faith.

When it is said, therefore, that God does not need to be propitiated by an outward offering of any kind, it is meant that nothing external has been done, and that nothing external could be done, to make him either able or willing to forgive. Since, according to the Scriptures, atonement is in his character, nothing was ever performed that enabled him either to receive the soul of a little child that has not sinned or to remit the sins of a wicked man who complies with the conditions of forgiveness. Had theologians sufficiently considered that God is a



Spirit, and consequently can receive nothing but something spiritual; that the essence of his character is love, and consequently he needs nothing to make him loving, they would have seen what the prophets and apostles saw, namely, that such terms as "ransom," "redeem," "sacrifice," "propitiation," could be used of him, or in relation to him, only in a figurative sense.

Though God does not need to be appeased by means of an external object, there is, nevertheless, an element of propitiation in atonement; for, when a person turns from sin to righteousness, the divine displeasure ceases to exist, because the bar to reconciliation is then removed. The teaching of Isaiah 59: 1, 2 is pertinent here. Addressing the Israelites, the prophet says, to give a literal translation, "The hand of Jehovah is not too short to save, nor is his ear too heavy to hear, but your sins have become a barrier between you and your God, and your iniquities have hidden his face from you, so that he does not hear." It was not his unwillingness to hear, nor his inability to help, but the sin of the people, that was the hindrance to deliverance. Thus sin was the sole cause of separation, and it is the sole barrier to reconciliation.

God does not hide his face, much less withdraw his favour, from any one; but sin separates man from him by interrupting spiritual communion. So long as separation continues, so long estrangement

remains. When a sinner repents, however, and abandons his evil-doing, the divine favour returns, just as soon as sin is put away, separation ceases and communion is restored. Divine displeasure or disfavour, therefore, being the result of separation from God, is something that men bring upon themselves. It is the result of a wrong relation or a wrong attitude.

Therein lies the explanation of Psalm 18:26, which suggests that God meets man as man meets him. He shows himself pure to the pure man, and froward to the perverse, because the pure man has a right relation to him, and the perverse man has not. The attitude of the one is sympathetic, while that of the other is antipathetic. The different manner of meeting is owing to a different attitude on the part of the two men. If the response be antagonistic, as that of a bad man is, the cause of the antagonism is in the man himself. The manifestation both of divine favour and of divine disfavour is conditioned on man's relation to God and on man's attitude towards him.

A changed human attitude, however, produces no change in the divine attitude, because that does not admit of change. Benevolence is a permanent attribute of the Deity, as brightness is a permanent attribute of the sun; and, as the sun is always shedding light, so God is always shedding love. God is love, perfect love; and perfect love is constant. "I

am Jehovah, I change not," Malachi 3:6 makes the Divine Being say. He is not capable of changing, much less susceptible to change. He is ever our faithful, unchangeable friend.

Hence the divine attitude is always the same, for if he does not change, his attitude cannot. He loves the sinner, but is antagonistic towards his sin. A true father loves his child, even when displeased at his behaviour. So the heavenly Father, though displeased at sin, both loves and woos the sinner all the time, and seeks in every way he can to lead him to repent. The truth of this assertion is put beyond doubt by the statement in Romans 5:8 that, while we were still sinners, God gave us Christ as a proof of his compassionating love.

The doctrine of the psalmist is that God deals with men according to their character, and the principles of his government are such that he cannot deal with them in any other way. His is a perfect administration, and he is at cross-purposes with the wicked because the wicked are at cross-purposes with him. His holiness is immutable, but its operation, like that of the sun, which softens wax and hardens clay, depends on the particular attitude of each human being. If the personal relation be right, the effect of the operation will be agreeable; but, if the personal relation be wrong, the effect will be just the reverse. In each case the result will correspond to

the conduct. God is a benignant sun to those who observe his laws, but a consuming fire to those who violate them.

No more requires to be said at present respecting the freeness of divine favour and the spontaneousness of divine forgiveness. It has been shown that propitiation is an essential attribute of the Deity. If a finite being possesses it, an infinite Being must. It has been shown that the Biblical writers knew that he possessed it, and laid great stress upon that fact. The idea that he needs to be appeased is neither Christian nor Jewish, but pagan and heathen. It has also been shown that those passages of Scripture which were once held to teach the contrary have been misinterpreted. There is nothing in the Bible to justify such a view.

Were it not superfluous, it might be shown that, if God did need to be appeased by an external object, there is nothing we could give him; for the earth is his and its fulness, too, as the psalmist no less than the apostle has said. All things come from him, and we can only return to him what he has bestowed on us. We can give him nothing but our hearts, and in giving them we do something for ourselves, and not for him.

When we walk into the sunshine we do not give the sun anything, but place ourselves where it can give us something—light and heat, or brightness and warmth. So, when we put ourselves right with

God by offering him our hearts, we do not really give him anything; but simply place ourselves in such a relation to him that he can give us everything—light and love, and power and peace, and guidance and grace.

### III

## ATONEMENT IN CHRIST

**B**EING in an eminent sense the Son of Man and in a pre-eminent sense the Son of God, Christ is uniquely related to both God and men. Because of his unique relation to men on the one side, and to God on the other, he is the second factor to be considered. In order to evince the nature of atonement in him, we must see what he is said to have done, and how he is said to have done it. This necessitates, first of all, an examination of what the evangelists record concerning him.

It is a noteworthy fact, that nothing is specifically said in the gospels respecting the doctrine of atonement. The reason therefor is fairly obvious, though. During the ministry of Jesus he was practically engaged in reconciling men to God by his life and teaching, and it was not necessary for him to discuss the doctrine in a formal way. Then his immediate followers were mainly Jews, who had already a knowledge of God and were already reconciled to him. Through association with Jesus those faithful to his instruction not only imbibed most of his ideas, but also caught much of his spirit. In this way they

became one with him in a desire to please God and an endeavour to do his will.

Nor should we look for anything specific about atonement from the evangelists. The doctrine belongs to theology rather than history, and they were historians rather than theologians. His mission, however, is described by them as one of manifestation. In Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:22 he is represented as communicating to men the knowledge of the Father. By each of the Synoptists he is depicted as expressing the mind and attitude of God. By the Fourth Evangelist he is described as the only begotten of the Father, in whom the eternal Word was embodied and through whom the divine character was spoken forth. By all of them he is regarded as the perfect revelation of the true religious life. Though they do not use the term atonement, they represent Jesus as actively seeking to get men right with God by proclaiming his truth and declaring his love. Right relations with God and man form the burden of his teaching.

No hint is given in the gospels that anything Jesus did had any effect on God. On the contrary, his mission is represented, not as an expedient for changing the mind and attitude of God, but as a means of making his mind and attitude known. In Matthew 4:17 he is represented as saying at the beginning of his ministry, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." All that he is there

said to have done was to induce as many as he could to repent and become members of the kingdom of heaven; that is, to change from a wrong to a right state of mind and turn from a bad to a good course of life. And, in principle, that is all he is anywhere said to have done with regard to getting men right with their Maker. The object of his mission, like the purpose of his coming, was to change the attitude of men, not that of God; and the declaration that God sent him into the world because he loved the world should prevent us from supposing it possible to change his attitude. Much more should it keep us from thinking that any change in him was necessary.

The view of Jesus in regard to getting men right with their Maker may be gathered partly from the parable of the Prodigal Son, and partly from the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. From each of these records it appears that, in order to do what he came to do, he appealed to the highest and best there is in man by presenting the highest and best there is in God. And no other way is so reasonable or could be so effective.

In the sermon Jesus teaches that God has a love of benevolence towards all men—a love that is shown to be perfect, or complete and impartial, by his causing the sun to shine on the evil and the good, and by his sending the rain on the just and the unjust; and he shows that we are children of God in a



spiritual sense when we cherish the same love one towards another. Then he exhorts his disciples to be perfect, or complete and impartial, in their love as the heavenly Father is in his. Hence, according to the sermon, to get right with God is so to relate ourselves to him that we may become one with him in the spirit of benevolence, and thus grow gradually like him, because he desires his children to be like himself.

In the parable, where the father represents God, and the prodigal any person that strays away from him, Jesus teaches that, when a wanderer comes back to God, he is not simply ready to receive him, but waiting to welcome him to his heart; for, as soon as the erring one resolved to return to his father, the latter went forth to meet him, and on meeting him greeted him with a kiss of reconciliation. Thus the heavenly Father accepts the very effort to find him, and anticipates it with his pardoning grace. In the parable, as in the sermon, therefore, to get right with God is to put one's self in harmony with him, and become one with him by personal devotion to his will. Nothing more is necessary, and nothing more could be done.

As Christ is called a "ransom" in Matthew 20: 28 and Mark 10: 45 those verses should be explained before we pass from the gospels to the epistles. The term is there used symbolically, first, because it is nowhere used of him literally, nor

could it be so used in reference to God. He gave himself for us, but he gave nothing to God for us. Then, secondly, the term is there used in a symbolic sense, because the subject there discussed is self-denying service. Our Lord did not regard himself as a literal ransom, but as a redemption or deliverance, that is, a means of rescuing men from sin; and the context shows that he was speaking of something done for men, not of something given to God. The parallelism of the clauses helps us to understand the thought. A more expressive rendering of the original would read, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ministration in behalf of many"; or, more simply, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a service in behalf of many."<sup>1</sup>

We have here a Hebrew construction of well-known significance. It indicates that the last clause was framed to express the same idea as the one preceding it; and, as the preceding one speaks of ministering, the word for ransom is equivalent to ministration or service. Then, since the preposition "for" is ambiguous, it is objectionable. It suggests the notion of substitution, but that is not what the evangelists intend. They refer to the benefits conferred on humanity by the life and teaching of

<sup>1</sup>This word has the force of a great multitude, or the mass of mankind, as in Romans 5: 15-17.

Christ, as the subject of self-denying service proves. Hence, the particle should be translated "in behalf of," "for the sake of," or "for the advantage of."<sup>1</sup>

So the preposition used in I. Timothy 2:6 should be translated, and so the context requires us to translate the preposition here. There he is said to have given himself a ransom or benefit in behalf of all, and here he is said to have given his life a ransom or benefit in behalf of the many; but the thought expressed in each case is substantially the same.<sup>2</sup> Jesus came to serve at any cost whatever to himself. In no other way than by the gift of himself could mankind have been reached and rescued through his instrumentality. To give his life a ransom, therefore, meant to make a sacrifice of himself for the sake of rescuing men from sin through his self-denying service in their behalf. His life was thus

<sup>1</sup> The preposition in Greek signifies "in the room of" when used literally of one person taking the place of another, as in Matthew 2:22, where we are told that Archelaus was reigning over Judea "in the room of his father Herod." But, in its moral or religious relation, it has the meaning given above, for the reason that in moral or religious matters one cannot take the place of another.

<sup>2</sup> In the epistle we have *ἀντὶ λυτροῦ ὑπὲρ* with a genitive, which is equal to *λυτροῦ ἀντὶ* with the genitive in the gospels; and, as the former should be translated a ransom or service "in behalf of," the latter should be so translated, too. It is interesting to observe that in each gospel the Vulgate has *pro*, which suggests a similar meaning.

a redemption price, not as an offering to God, but as a sacrifice for men.

Thus, according to the testimony of the evangelists, atonement in Christ is mediative. That is to say, he mediates atonement by bringing men into right relations with the Father. Though he is not reported to have said anything specific concerning the doctrine itself, he is regarded by his biographers as a great peace-maker, or a unique reconciler, between God and men. By them his whole mission of manifestation is viewed as having exerted a reconciling influence on reverent and receptive minds. Their view of his atoning influence having been shown, it is now necessary to show how far the view of the apostles agrees with it. Before this is done, however, an important point of agreement between the teaching of the evangelists and that of the canonical prophets deserves to be mentioned.

The teaching of the latter respecting the spiritual work of the Messiah corresponds quite closely to that presented in the gospels respecting Jesus. The Christ foreshadowed by them was expected, among other things, to be an authoritative teacher or counsellor, who should possess peculiar mental, moral, and practical qualifications for his office. According to Isaiah 11:2 he was to be a person specially endowed in each of those respects with the spirit of Jehovah, and thus fitted to lead his people into fellowship with him and conformity to his will. What

this Coming One was expected to do in a religious way for the Jews, Jesus, as the divine fulfiller of prophecy, is proved by the testimony of his historians to have done for the world.

The formulation of the doctrine was left to those who had more time for reflection and more training in interpretation than the evangelists had. The first and chief interpreter of Christ was the apostle Paul. Compared with the personal followers of Jesus, he had special qualifications for understanding him. Then, besides his special qualifications, both natural and acquired, he had the advantage of perspective. The personal followers of Jesus were too near to him to see things in their true proportions. Paul seems also to have looked more deeply into the nature of his mission than his immediate disciples did, and to have seen more clearly than they saw the significance of his work. At all events, he states more plainly than they the precise manner of its operation in the salvation of men.

In II. Corinthians 5:19 Paul asserts that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The world here is mankind in general, so far as they had heard of Christ and had become united to God by means of him; and, in both this and the preceding verse, he is regarded as instrumentally reconciling men to God. That which made him the instrument of reconciliation, or the means by which reconciliation is effected, was the indwelling of God,

or the plenary gift of the Spirit; for the Spirit was given to him plenary, John 3: 34 intimates. His life and teaching exerted a reconciling influence to a notable degree. By his life and teaching men were brought to see their condition as sinners before God, and by the operation of his spirit they were brought to feel their need of getting right with him. Thus they were led to become reconciled to him then, and thus they are led to become reconciled to him now.

In the next two verses Paul represents himself as an ambassador of Christ, beseeching men on his behalf to become reconciled to God, and presents his petition on the ground that he who knew no sin was "made sin on our behalf," that we might become the righteousness of God in him. And he urges his prayer with the earnestness of a man through whom God was directly speaking, for he beseeches those addressed as though God were entreating them by means of him. Nowhere is the atoning love of God more powerfully described than in this passage, and nowhere is the moral character of atonement in Christ more plainly expressed. "If any man is in Christ, Paul says, "he is a new creature." To be in Christ is to be in spiritual union with him. Men get morally right with God by becoming spiritually one with Christ in volitional freedom from conscious or intentional sin.

When Paul says in the twenty-first verse that he who knew not sin was "made sin on our behalf,"

he employs a paradox, or a form of speech designed to produce a strong impression. He does not mean that Christ was made a sin offering, for that would destroy the antithesis to "righteousness" contained in the verse, and would require the word for "sin" to be understood in different senses in the same sentence. Nor does he mean that Christ was made a sin-bearer, as if he had borne or carried our sins, for sin cannot be transferred, and there is nothing in the passage about bearing or carrying sins.<sup>1</sup> Neither does he mean that God caused Christ to assume human guilt, as some have suggested, for guilt no more than sin can be transferred. But Paul means that God appointed Christ to do a certain work, and permitted him in the performance of it to be treated as if he had been a sinner.

A similar explanation should be given of Galatians 3: 13, where Christ is said to have become "a curse" on our behalf. He is there represented as a devoted victim on whom sin was symbolically laid, as in the case of the scapegoat; and the meaning is that he allowed himself to be treated as one accursed. By going to the cross in the discharge of duty he became, as it were, a devoted thing. In this as in the other passage, we have a Hebrew form of speech,

<sup>1</sup>In a later chapter it will be shown that to bear sins or iniquities means in the Bible to bear the consequences of sin. With this meaning the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53: 11 is described as bearing the iniquities of the unrighteous Israelites.

and a highly figurative form at that. In each passage his voluntary act is viewed as a providential appointment, and his treatment as a permissive one. He was commissioned to do voluntarily for us that which led him to be despitefully used on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him, or in union with him, as the phrase implies. When stripped of metaphor, the thought in each verse is very manifest.

What Paul says in II. Corinthians 5: 19 harmonizes with what is said in Romans 3: 23-26, a beautiful but badly understood group of verses, whose import, owing to the employment of the term translated "propitiation," has generally been overlooked. But for the presence of that term, there would have been no difficulty in understanding the meaning, as all the other words employed are very common ones. Prior to our dealing with these verses, therefore, we must resume our study of the term that has caused so much confusion, because it furnishes the key to this very expressive passage.

The word in Greek is a neuter adjective used as a substantive, signifying a propitiatory, and is employed in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the lid of the ark. In that way it is used in Hebrews 9: 5, the only other New Testament passage in which it occurs; and there it is rendered in the English versions "mercy-seat," which denotes the cover of the ark. That was the place, it will be



remembered, where divine mercy was publicly dispensed, and where human sins were symbolically covered; for the lid of the ark was simply a symbol of the merciful presence of Jehovah. It expressed something propitious in him, or that in him which forgives. Hence in each of these passages the word is used in the sense of a symbolic covering, or a symbolic propitiatory covering, because men looked upon the lid of the ark as an instrument of atonement, or a means of reconciliation. By inserting one of these phrases in the passage under consideration the meaning will become immediately apparent.

At the twenty-third verse of the chapter, the author proceeds to exhibit the nature of the salvation which constitutes the gospel of Christ a revelation of the divine righteousness—a righteousness that extends to all men, and is effectual on all who believe. Then, to give a simple rendering, he goes on to say, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; but all are freely declared righteous<sup>1</sup> by his grace through the deliverance that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth *an instrument of atonement*,<sup>2</sup> through faith in his blood, for a proof of

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word rendered “being justified” in the English versions means being declared righteous, and is well translated “pronounced righteous” in The Twentieth Century New Testament.

<sup>2</sup>The authors of The Twentieth Century New Testament in-

his righteousness, because of the pretermission, in the forbearance of God, of the sins that were previously committed; for a proof also of his righteousness at the present time, to the effect that he is righteous and that he declares righteous him who is of faith in Jesus."

It will be observed that Christ is not said to have made a propitiation, but that he is said to have been a propitiatory, or an instrument of atonement. It is he himself, and not his work, that is so designated. That fact should have kept men from thinking that anything he did had any influence on God. As God is love, and cannot be made propitious, the word must be used of Christ in a symbolic sense; and, as God set him forth before the world to do something for him, it must symbolize something in God. And the context tells us plainly why he was set forth. It was to demonstrate the divine righteousness in two respects: first, to prove that God was righteous when he passed over the sins that men committed in ignorance before the coming of Christ; and, secondly, to prove that God is righteous in pardoning the sins of those who, since the advent, have faith in Christ. He was set forth solely with the view of expressing the divine character and of declaring the divine purpose, so that he was a propitiatory only in the sense of manifesting the perfect love of God. And

sert the phrase, "a means of reconciliation," which is a proper alternative.

that is the very thought which is expressed in John 3:16. The two passages are the same in that respect.

Because the covering of the ark was called a propitiatory, some have supposed that the flesh of our Lord, which veiled his deity, was a covering of our sin, but that supposition is as unscriptural as it is gross. The propitiatory represented the symbolic covering of sins, and Christ represents that in God which symbolically covers sins. He was a means of reconciliation, not of propitiation, because propitiation suggests that God requires something to render him propitious. Nor does the word propitiatory imply that there was anything in sacrificial offering that moved God to forgiveness or that made it possible for him to forgive. That which moves him to forgiveness is repentance, and that which makes it possible for him to forgive is a changed relation on the part of man. No offering can move him, nor can anything influence him, in the sense of operating on him. It is he who influences us by operating on us. Instead of intimating that God needs something to render him propitious, the passage indicates that he is so kindly disposed towards men that he presented Christ to them as a proof of his propitiousness.

During the past few years scholars have discovered from various sources that, to an extent not formerly supposed, the New Testament is written

in the normal language of Greek-speaking people whose vocabulary was that of what is known as later Greek. In an important work, Professor Deissmann has shown the significance of contemporary usage in regard to the word translated propitiatory, and his remarks corroborate the explanation given above. In some inscriptions belonging to the close of the first century, he finds that the word is used as a common term for "a votive or propitiatory gift." Those for whom the epistle to the Romans was designed, he says, would certainly understand the verse before us in the sense that God set forth Christ publicly for a demonstration of his goodness.<sup>1</sup>

So we obtain the same result from this passage that we obtained from the previous one. Christ is a votive or propitiatory gift from God to men, set forth to demonstrate his love to them, and to bring them into harmony with his will. And a similar result is obtainable from the other passages where the word propitiation occurs. A different word is used in the original, but it is derived from the same root as the one we have just explained, and it is applied to Jesus in a very similar way. There are two verses to be examined, and each of these is in the first epistle of John.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Bible Studies," pp. 124-135, Authorized translation.

<sup>2</sup>In Romans the word used is *ἱλαστήριον*; in this epistle we have the word *ἱλασμός*. The former is a purely ecclesiastical term.

In chapter 2:2, after saying that if any man should sin, we have a helper (paraclete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, the apostle adds, "he is a propitiation in behalf of our sins, and not in behalf of ours only, but also in behalf of (those) of the whole world." Here, by the figure of metonymy, the act standing for the actor or agent, Jesus is called a "propitiation," just as he is called a "sanctification" in I. Corinthians 1:30; and John teaches that he is our atoner or reconciler, just as Paul teaches that he is our sanctifier. It is not the work of Christ, but Christ himself, that is said to be a propitiation, each one should notice again. He himself is an instrument of atonement, or a means of reconciliation. He is our helper with the Father, not to dispose him to be favourable towards us, but to show that he is favourably disposed; and to assure us that, in case we do sin, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, as is expressly stated a couple of verses earlier in the epistle.

When Wesley, therefore, and the older theologians in general taught that Christ was "the atoning sacrifice by which the wrath of God is appeased," they overlooked the figurative character of the term employed, and read a heathen meaning into it. The act of atonement expressed in the term symbolizes an act of covering or pardoning on the part of God. To speak with Dr. Bernhard Weiss, "This act is

not, as in the classical and hellenistic use of language, that by which God is made gracious again, but corresponding to the Old Testament representation of sacrifice, that by which the sin is covered from the eyes of God and so expiated."<sup>1</sup> It is scarcely necessary to add that sin can be only figuratively or symbolically covered from his eyes.

In chapter 4:10, where the word occurs again, its use is almost more apparent. Having said in the preceding verse that the love of God is manifested in us by the sending of his only begotten Son, the apostle continues, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son a propitiation in behalf of our sins." Here we have the same use of the word by the same figure of metonymy. Here, too, it is Christ himself, and not his work, that is said to be a propitiation. He is so designated because he was sent to manifest the love of God to men and to reconcile them to him. Hence he is an instrument of atonement, or a means of reconciliation, as in each other case. If the meaning of the term in the other passages had been obscure, though in neither of them is there the slightest obscurity, the meaning in this passage would be obvious. Here, as elsewhere, the gift of Jesus is regarded as a demonstration of the love of God.

<sup>1</sup>See Meyer's Commentary on this passage, fifth German edition.

One passage more remains to be considered, namely, Hebrews 2:17, where Christ is said to have been made like his brethren, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." The people for whom he is said to make reconciliation are, as in other parts of this epistle, the historic people of Jehovah, though the scope of the apostle's thought embraces the spiritual Israel in every age. Jesus is here represented under the figure of a priest, or a mediator between God and men; for the Hebrew priest held the office of reconciliation. To discharge faithfully the duties of a priestly office, it was necessary for him to be made like his brethren, and to be tempted like them. Otherwise, the writer, means, he could not have become a compassionate high priest.

It should be carefully noticed that nothing Jesus did is here said to have exerted any influence on God. To either a prophet or an apostle such a thought was inconceivable. All that the passage teaches is that, as the high priest made atonement symbolically for the sins of the people, so Jesus may be viewed as having done the same; for the verb to make reconciliation is here used just as it is in the Septuagint translation of Psalms 25:11 and 65:3.<sup>1</sup> It was God who, of his own accord, covered or cancelled the sins, we have seen; it is he himself, therefore,

<sup>1</sup>In each of these psalms the verb *ἰλάσκομαι* is employed.

who makes atonement or reconciliation for sin in each and every case. The Biblical writers are a unit on this point.

To say, as some have said, that the word is used to express a changed feeling on the part of God, is to say what is contrary to fact; for nothing Jesus is reported to have done is represented as having any effect whatever upon God. His love is free to all who desire it and his grace is given to all who will receive it. As atonement is in his character, the sole necessity for reconciliation lies in the sinful attitude of man. If theologians had fully perceived what the apostles have plainly declared, namely, that Jesus was set forth to demonstrate the righteousness and manifest the love of God, they would have seen the unreasonableness of supposing that anything he did could make any change in the divine mind.

From the last passage it appears that the author regards the work of Christ as mediative, just as Paul regards it, and just as the evangelists regard it. The author of I. Timothy 2: 5 not only views him as a mediator, but also employs the very word. To give a literal rendering of the verse, he says, "For one is God: one also is a mediator of God and men, a man Christ Jesus." The conjunction "for" assigns the reason for the statement in the preceding verse that God, our Saviour, desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. The saving truth of the Gospel, or the truth as it



is in Jesus, the writer means. In his thought, to be consciously saved is to have a practical acquaintance with saving truth. There is only one way of gaining such an experience, the verse teaches; and he who is called Christ Jesus has not simply pointed out, but is himself, the way. As one alone is God, so one alone is mediator in the full sense of the term, that is, in the sense of revealing the will of the Saviour, and of expressing that in him which saves.

Christ being a mediator does not imply, as some theologians have suggested, that God is an offended sovereign, who can be approached only by his beloved Son, with the price of redemption in his hand. The very notion is abhorrent. The term mediator means a go-between, and in the Scriptures it has an ethical significance. Its Biblical use is well shown in the Septuagint translation of Job 9:33, where the Hebrew word for "daysman," or "umpire" is rendered by the same Greek word that stands in the verse we are now studying; so that a mediator is one who acts as an agent to settle a dispute of some kind, or one who interposes to set matters right between two parties at variance with each other. Hence Christ is an interposer, or a go-between, to mediate peace between mankind and God.

In Galatians 3:19 Moses is styled a mediator, because he was the medium of communicating to the Israelites a portion of the law of God, or a measure of divine truth. His mediatorship was one of mani-

festation for a certain people, at a certain period in history; though, so far as he communicated fundamental ideas, he was a mediator also for those subsequent to his time. The author of I. Timothy, however, refers to Jesus, not as an ordinary, but as an extraordinary, mediator. And such of our evangelists show him to have been, for they unitedly speak of him as manifesting the divine character. As the perfect revealer of the will of God, he is a mediator in a much higher sense than Moses, because his mediatorship is one of manifestation for all classes of men, and for all periods of time. His mediatorship, moreover, does not consist in manifestation merely, but in reconciliation of the estranged parties, God and men. Coming between them as a peace-maker, no less than a revealer, he is a reconciler of man to God.

As to the way he mediates we are told in the next verse. He gave himself "a ransom in behalf of all"; to translate literally the apostle's words, which are similar to those of Matthew and Mark, and convey the same idea, we have seen. In the exercise of his office, he gave himself a ministratio*n*, or a means of service, for mankind. It was the giving of himself completely and the manifestation of the Father's character fully that made him the unique mediator. He had more to give than any other, and he gave all he had. That "ransom"

has the force of service here is proved, not only by the way the evangelists use it, but also by the way word is used in Proverbs 13:8. There the author of the passage says, "The ransom of a man's life is his riches," meaning that money is a service to a man in time of danger, a means of deliverance when a thief or robber threatens to take his life. The notion of advantage is common to each passage, and that was the notion in the apostle's mind. Christ is the divinely qualified instrument for getting men right with God, or the divinely appointed medium of reconciling them to him.

The passages examined make it plain that it is man, not God, that needs to be reconciled. That God is willing to be reconciled to men and wants them to be reconciled to him, is taken for granted by every Biblical writer. That it was presupposed by Paul is proved by his statement that God was reconciling men to himself through the life and teaching of our Lord. It is also proved by what he states in the preceding verse, that "All things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ," that is, through his life and teaching. God is the source of all that has to do with human salvation. He is the author of the work both of reconciling men and of creating them anew. It is he who effects the reconciliation, no less than the regeneration. He is the origin of the whole process of restoration and redemption, for from him proceeds the love that

gave us Christ and the grace that has come to us through him.

His mediation did not produce that love, it is scarcely necessary to say, nor was it in any sense a moving cause. On the contrary, that love was the originating cause of his mediatorial work. Neither did his mediation, let it be said once more, make any change in God. It did not affect his attitude, much less his character, because, as stated in the preceding chapter, his character is unchangeable, and his attitude is always the same. To amplify what was there stated, a Being of perfect love knows no such thing as change. The heavenly Father loves his children even when offended at them or displeased with them, and is seeking all the time to woo them to himself and win them from their sin. In our relations with him, it is the offended, not the offending, party that seeks to be reconciled. The change effected by forgiveness, therefore, is not in offended God, but in offending man, since he is the one that changes the relationship. His sin causes the estrangement, and it is the party causing the estrangement that must change. There is no bar to peace in God; the sole barrier is in man.

We may now see the Scriptural significance of the work of Christ. In its practical aspect it was manwards, wholly manwards. While his work has its Godward side, it is manwards in its operation. His mediation has been shown to have had an effect

on man, and not on God; and it was necessary, not to enable him to forgive us, nor to enable us to approach him, but to incline us to repent and turn to him. In other words, the object of his mediatorial mission was not to make God propitious, but to make men penitent, by giving them a true conception of him, and by bringing them into a conscious acquaintance with him. To epitomize the simple teaching of the evangelists, he came to call sinners to repentance by informing them that God is their Father, and by assuring them that he is as willing to forgive them when they repent and confess as an earthly parent is to forgive his child. He came to seek and save lost men by animating them with new hopes and by imparting to them new impulses. He came, in short, to redeem mankind from sin by communicating to them his spirit and by inspiring them with his life.

Each passage that relates to the subject testifies to the same great fact, that all he did was done on our behalf and for our sake. And what he did was done not simply for our sake, but to the intent that we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, as Titus 2:12 teaches. For he gave himself on our behalf, the fourteenth verse declares, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." No better proof is needed, nor could better

proof be given of the manward bearing of his work.

We can never estimate the value or compute the power of what he did, but his mediation was a moral agency. He undertook a moral task, in accordance with a divine purpose, and he brought it to completion by purely moral means. The earthly work of Jesus, therefore, consisted in the life he lived, the doctrine he taught, the death he died, and the spirit he bestowed, in loving obedience to the will of the Father, to effect the reconciliation of men to God.

Self-manifestation is an attribute of the Deity, and he has always been manifesting himself to men, and by means of men. For this reason, he has had his mediators among every people and in every age. In Galatians 3: 19, we have noticed, Moses is expressly mentioned as a mediator; and in Isaiah 43: 27 the ancient prophets are described as mediators or interpreters. The prophets mediated Jehovah to the Israelites by communicating to them his truth and interpreting to them his will, so that interpretation forms an important part of mediation. Similarly Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed were mediators to those to whom they communicated the truth and interpreted the will of God. On the same principle, all great personalities are mediators, so far as they manifest the divine character to others; and so, indeed,

are good men everywhere, each one in his own degree.

But, notwithstanding the fact that there have been many mediators, in the unique sense of the term there has been only one mediator, and that is the man Christ Jesus. As the perfect revelation of the Father he is his perfect mediator because, as previously stated, his mediation consists not in mediation merely, but in reconciliation, as well. Those who become consciously reconciled to God are reconciled through him, or through spiritual union with him.

In a deep divine sense, therefore, though he is not so described in Scripture, he may be called our atonement, just as in Ephesians 2: 14 he is called our peace; for he mediates reconciliation, no less than peace. By uniting men to himself and inspiring them with his life, he not only produces peace among them, but also draws them into at-one-ment with God.

## IV

### ATONEMENT IN MAN

**C**OMING to the third factor, we have now to consider the nature of atonement in man, as set forth in the Scriptures. Since he is the party practically concerned, or the party solely concerned in the practical sense, the human factor is important next to the divine. Its importance will appear as we proceed, because atonement in man is subjective and experimentative.

At the outset it was stated that, while the word atonement is of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament, it occurs but once in the Authorized, and not at all in the Revised, Version of the New Testament. It was also stated that, while the root of the verb to atone in Hebrew means to cover or cancel, the word itself is used in the sense of pardoning or forgiving; because, when God forgives men, their sins are viewed by the Hebrew writers as atoned, and the atonement is regarded as his act. It is he who covers or cancels sins; it is he who pardons or forgives sinners; it is he who removes their guilt and frees them from condemnation.

Though the verb from which it is derived is used



of God in the Bible, the term atonement is not there used of him. The noun is employed only of some one making atonement or of the day on which atonement was made. In the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus the high priest is directed to make atonement for himself and for the people on the great day of national humiliation, but his act, as said before, was a purely symbolic one. What he did was only an object-lesson, for God was known to pardon sinners of his own accord. And, since the verb in question means to make atonement, as well as to cover or cancel, he may consistently be said to make atonement. It seems important to repeat this fact, because so many have been led to believe that offences towards God are expiated by the sacrificial work of Christ. His work, however, was redemptive but not expiatory, as has been demonstrated.

We have one example of the Old Testament usage in Hebrews 2:17, the reader will recall. In that verse Jesus is represented as a merciful and faithful high priest, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." But, as he was a high priest only in a spiritual sense, he made atonement merely in a spiritual way. According to the Scriptures God is our atonement, and he reconciles men to himself through Christ. Though some phases of the process have already been explained, the way in which he does this needs to be much more fully shown.

The only passage in the New Testament where the Authorized Version has the term atonement is Romans 5: 11, and there the word in Greek denotes reconciliation, or a change from enmity to friendship. The original is rightly rendered by the Revisers, "We rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." Atonement is reconciliation, and the doctrine ought always to have been explained in accordance with that fact. The context shows, it should be noticed, that the word in Greek is used, not for the means by which reconciliation between God and man is effected, but for the reconciliation itself.

The nature of the reconciliation is indicated in the preceding verse, where the writer speaks of those who have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Hence the manifest meaning of the term in this passage is the experience into which those enter who are brought into harmony with God through Christ. It is the state of being reconciled to him, or the change experienced when friendship takes the place of enmity. Nothing is here said as to how reconciliation is effected. That is made plain elsewhere. The simple fact is stated that we have become reconciled.

To treat this aspect of the subject thoroughly, let us ask, first, what makes reconciliation necessary. If God is their Father and men are his chil-

dren, why need they to be reconciled to him? The answer is, because most of them are prodigals, having erred or strayed from his paths. At some time or other all have erred to a greater or lesser extent. As Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God," for the reason suggested in chapter 8:7, that the carnal mind, or the mind of the flesh, is enmity against him, being more or less in opposition to him. By the mind of the flesh is meant that in the flesh which tends to insubmission. This tendency springs from selfishness and unregenerate desire. Owing to selfish and insubmissive tendencies, all men fall short of the divine ideal.

Estrangement springs from insubmission, and insubmission leads to sin. Insubmission to God, indeed, is sin. Sin estranges by separating man from his Maker. The author of Isaiah 59:1, 2 is emphatic on this point. To give a literal rendering again, he says, "The hand of Jehovah is not too short to save, nor is his ear too heavy to hear; but your iniquities have made a barrier between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he does not hear." The sole hindrance to friendship and fellowship is on the side of man. His sin has been, and continues to be, the cause of alienation. Other than that which sin has made, there is no barrier to be removed, no chasm to be bridged, no wall to be overthrown.

So the necessity for reconciliation comes from sin.

Let us next inquire how reconciliation is effected. If sin has separated from God, the natural way would be to restore the union by righting the relationship. All that should be needed is to remove the cause of alienation, reason suggests; and, according to the teaching of Jesus, that is all that is required. This is shown in the case of the Prodigal Son. As soon as he was ready to return to his father, the father was ready to receive him. And this is what the apostle teaches in terms which cannot be too deeply impressed. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Open confession, though natural, is not demanded, but inward acknowledgment is. What God demands is a complete turning from sin to righteousness. But all intentional sin produces guilt, and every conscious sinner feels himself guilty before God. Hence confession is the spontaneous act of a contrite heart.

Reconciliation is thus conditioned on contrition and confession, or penitence and amendment. Those are the sole conditions, for they involve a sorrow for sin and a turning away from it; and divine pardon presupposes both. As the prophet says, to quote again another verse which cannot be too strongly emphasized, "Let the wicked forsake

his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Till sinners change their attitude, as well as their mind, by righting their relationship to God, they have not truly repented; and, without true repentance, which is turning from sin to holiness, divine forgiveness is impossible. Sorrow for sin has no significance, unless it lead to improvement or reform.

If the willingness of God to forgive is to result in union between him and the sinner, as the prophet teaches, he must forsake his way and relinquish his unrighteous thoughts. Both prophets and apostles taught that reconciliation is effected by ethical means, and laid the greatest stress on reformation of conduct. In his charge to the presbyters at Miletus, as recorded in Acts 20: 21, Paul declares that, during his stay in proconsular Asia, he had proclaimed to both Jews and Greeks the duty of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Faith towards the Lord Jesus means allegiance to his truth, and devotion to him whom he reveals and represents. Hence penitence and amendment are equivalent to repentance and faith; and these, if genuine, produce holiness of heart and life.

All that a sinner, therefore, is required to do is to adjust his relations to God so as to be in harmony

with him; and to keep them adjusted, by the aid of the Divine Spirit, so as to make harmonious action possible and continuous. There has thus to be a thorough moral change, in order to get right with God and keep right with him. Though formal confession may be a sign of sincerity, the amended life is the proof of an inward change. God sees the heart, however, and, as soon as we repent of sin and turn away from it, forgiveness takes place. Genuine repentance brings instant pardon, I. John 1:9 implies; and Psalm 32:5 suggests that the moment honest acknowledgment is made that moment divine forgiveness is obtained.

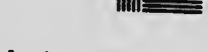
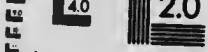
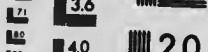
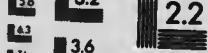
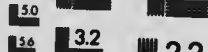
But the reconciliation is received through Christ, the author of the epistle to the Romans says, which means through our interest in him and our oneness with him as the unique mediator of God. We become reconciled to the Father in virtue of our spiritual union with the Son. In II. Corinthians 5:17-19 the manner of the reconciling is described by Paul both negatively and positively. Looking at its negative aspect, he says that God reconciles men to himself by not reckoning to them their trespasses, which is the same as saying that he cancels or forgives their sins; looking at its positive aspect, he says that God reconciles men to himself by re-creating them, so that each man in Christ, or each one in union with him, is a new being.

Thus God reconciles men to himself by remitting



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their sins and by creating them anew. Forgiveness and regeneration, therefore, are involved in reconciliation. Paul intimates, moreover, that each person reconciled must not only repent of his sins, but also give up his opposition, or lay aside his enmity; because he states concerning the man in Christ that the old things pertaining to life and conduct have passed away, and that all such matters have become new. Hence reconciliation to God through Christ is a moral transaction. To all who will accept them on moral terms God offers both pardon and peace.

Reconciliation, however, is not a mere subjective change of our feelings towards God, but a complete change of our relation to him, so far as that relation has been wrong. There will be feeling, of course; but feeling unaccompanied by action is of no consequence. Self-condemnation does no good, unless it cause us to repent and turn away from sin. Reconciliation to God through Christ is a moral transaction which involves restitution, also, as far as that is possible. Though often disregarded, that element is an important one, as was observed before.

It should here be mentioned that reconciliation may be either conscious or unconscious. But, whether conscious or unconscious, in each case it is received through Christ, because, as previously explained, Christ represents the anointed spirit of God, that spirit which redeems or saves. There-

fore, as atonement is in his character, God reconciles men to himself through union with Christ, the personal spirit which saves, whether they ever heard of Jesus or not. Therein lies the significance of Acts 4: 12, that *in* no other name is there salvation, because there is no other name (character or spirit) *wherein* we may be saved.<sup>1</sup>

While it is the privilege of those who hear of him to be consciously reconciled, those who have not the Gospel may get measurably right with God, because an impartial Being deals with men according to their inward character, or their spiritual relation to him. Hence, if they live up to the light they have, or the knowledge they possess, they are regarded by him with favour, though they may not be aware of it. In principle, the divine requirements are the same for all, as was said substantially in the second chapter.

Many a man is accepted who is not conscious of the fact, just as many a man is saved who does not know it. This is the case in Christian communities, as well as in heathen countries. Jesus shows us how to become conscious of our acceptance, and how to know that we are declared right-

<sup>1</sup> The preposition *ἐν* in this verse is rendered rightly in the Revised Version, but wrongly in the Authorized. The reader will observe that we are said to be saved not *by* the name of Jesus Christ, but *in* his name, that is, by union and association with him. As forgiveness is in Christ alone, so salvation is in him alone, too.

eous; but some who study the Gospel do not fully apprehend its meaning, and so are not wholly assured of their acceptance. But all who understand the Scriptures may have the assurance that they are acceptable to God, and that he regards them as righteous in virtue of their interest in Christ.

Ere we pass from this phase of the subject to examine some misused expressions and ambiguous passages, a few additional remarks should be made regarding divine forgiveness. God forgives men of his own accord and for his own sake, the prophets and psalmists teach. Then Ephesians 4:32 teaches that he forgives them "in Christ," and I. John 2:12 speaks of their being forgiven "for his name's sake."<sup>1</sup> The last two phrases are of equal import and have an equal force. Since the name of God means the divine character as revealed or manifested, so the name of Christ means his character as revealing or manifesting the Father. God forgives us for his own sake, but he forgives us in Christ. To be forgiven in Christ implies that we are morally one with him, and to be forgiven on account of his name implies that we have his character and possess his spirit. Participation in his life is what each apostle means.

Apart from our oneness with him and our possession of his spirit, there is no redemptive effect

<sup>1</sup> More literally, "on account of his name," that is, his character or spirit in us.

on us from his work. Hence there is no such thing as "imputed righteousness" in the sense of reckoning vicariously, or attributing something on account of another. Though a theological expression, it is not a Scriptural one. Nothing moral can be imputed, and the righteousness of Christ is not said in Scripture to be imputed. Romans 4:3 states that "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness."<sup>1</sup> But it was his faith, or active obedience, not the righteousness of Christ, that was reckoned to him; and such faith is reckoned for righteousness, because it installs a man in a right moral relation to God. Righteousness is not imputed; it is realized by personal effort through the exercise of faith.

Another theological phrase requires to be corrected in this connection. People speak of being saved or of finding favour through the "merits" of Christ. But it is nowhere suggested in Scripture that we are saved by his merits or in any way morally benefited by them. He bore the consequences, not the condemnation, of human sin, for condemnation implies personal guilt. God does not confer moral benefits upon us by virtue of the merits of another. Everything in the Bible contravenes the idea. Nothing counts with him but a right relation to him and a right attitude towards

<sup>1</sup> The preposition here is *eis*, which denotes direction. Faith is regarded by God because it is towards or unto righteousness.

life. Merit cannot be transferred any more than righteousness can be imputed. We are saved by the grace of God through union with Christ, the Scriptures teach; and it is the power of his truth and the operation of his spirit that prompt us to enter into the true relationship.

To be saved through Christ, his spirit must come into us, because salvation is a state of moral righteousness with God. It is that state into which regeneration brings us when we become transformed by the renewing of our mind. It is this inward change that constitutes the essence of a Christian life. We can never estimate the importance of his work to us or the magnitude of our debt to him, but nothing Christ has done for us can avail to save us, if we are not in moral harmony with God. Like righteousness, salvation is a matter of experience resulting from communion with him and devotion to his will, not something to put to our credit independently of our personal co-operation with him. It is only by our living righteously and practising morality that God regards us as righteous.

The apostles, like the prophets, were primarily religious teachers. Like the prophets, too, they were preachers of righteousness rather than teachers of theology; but theologians have misunderstood and misrepresented much of what they taught. Take, for instance, I. Corinthians 15:22 —“As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all

be made alive." Here Adam stands for the Adamic or unregenerate nature, and Christ stands for the renewed or regenerate nature. The terms, Adam and Christ, are thus used symbolically and representatively—the former denoting participation in the characteristics of the first man, whose origin is described as from earth; the latter denoting participation in the characteristics of the second man, whose origin is described as from heaven. So the contrast is between earth-born qualities and heaven-born qualities.

Towards the close of the chapter the apostle explains what he means by the term. The first man Adam became a living soul, or a living being, he says, in the forty-fifth verse; the second (man) Adam became a quickening or life-giving spirit. Viewing the first man as the head of the human race, he views the second man as his antitype, because he regards Christ as the head of a new spiritual seed, or an order of men possessed of his life-giving spirit. In the thought of the apostle, we derive from the first man that nature which renders us liable to corporeal and spiritual death, but from the second man that nature which insures to us immortality and resurrection. The newly quickened life is derived from Christ through personal union with him, of course. The idea in this epistle is more fully developed in the epistle to the Romans, where physical death is certainly not

the question raised, but death as an unregenerate state of soul.

In chapter 5:12, explaining the necessity for the reconciliation mentioned in the preceding verse, the apostle says, "As through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned." We should naturally expect the latter part of this sentence to read, "Even so, through one man righteousness entered into the world, and life through righteousness," and that would have been a logical continuation of the comparison commenced in the first part. But, instead of a logical continuation, we have a long digression intended to illustrate the assertion with which the verse commences, and the comparison is resumed in the eighteenth verse. The "one man" stands, it will be noticed, for the natural man, or the unregenerate nature, as, throughout the chapter, Christ stands for the spiritual man, or the regenerate nature. To quote from Lange, "Adam and Christ appear here as principles of the old and the new humanity."<sup>1</sup> We inherit by descent from the one a nature that tends to sin and death; we receive through union with the other a nature that tends to righteousness and life.

It should also be noticed that, in the assertion respecting death, we have a statement of experi-

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on Romans, *in loco*.

ence, not a statement of belief, and that physical death is not the point in question. There seems, at least, to be no necessary reference to the death of man merely as a physical fact, because the antithesis is plainly between spiritual death and spiritual life. That was, indeed, the practical reason for introducing the comparison. To speak with Bishop Edward Harold Browne, "The death which Adam brought in is opposed to the life which Christ bestows. That life is spiritual; hence the death which is antithetic to it is spiritual, too."<sup>1</sup>

Having in the intervening verses traced some differences between the things compared, or some contrasts exhibited by them, the writer goes on to say, "As through one trespass the *judgment* came unto all men to condemnation, even so through one act of righteousness the *free gift* came unto all men to justification of life; for, as through the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous." These two verses complete the comparison commenced in the twelfth verse, and present the parallel there suggested in a very vivid form. Expressed most briefly, the conclusion is that, as all men are reached for condemnation by inheriting a sinful nature from the first man, so by receiving a new nature through union with the second man all are reached

<sup>1</sup>"An Exposition of the Articles," British edition, p. 249.



for justification, or the being declared righteous, through becoming morally right with God.

The reader will perceive that the words "judgment" and "free gift" in verse eighteen are printed in italics, having been supplied by the translators from verse sixteen; but their insertion is utterly misleading. The writer does not speak of actual condemnation, nor of actual justification, but of something tending to condemnation in the one case and of something tending to justification in the other. This tendency is expressed in Greek by the preposition denoting direction, that is, motion to or towards; and a more adequate rendering of the original would be, "As by one sinful act, it is (or tends) to all men to condemnation, so by one righteous act it is (or tends) to all men to justification of life." Our connection with Adam tends to that which brings divine disfavour; our connection with Christ tends to that which brings divine approval. In neither case, however, is anything unconditional implied, but in each case individual responsibility is presupposed. There must be wrong-doing on our part to incur the disfavour, as there must be right-doing on our part to obtain the approval, of God. It is personal action that determines our moral relation to him.

That fact should be carefully borne in mind, because so many have based the doctrine of imputation on this passage. The author of the epistle

does not attribute the sin of Adam to his posterity, nor does he attribute the righteousness of Christ to his disciples. No notion so unreasonable is suggested either here or elsewhere. Though a theological one, it is wholly foreign to Scripture. Sin, like righteousness, is experienced, not imputed, because each implies volitional action, which produces a corresponding state of sc<sup>h</sup>. We are sinners, not because the first man sinned, but because we have sinned; and we become sinners only by sharing in his act of disobedience. In like manner, we become righteous, not by reason of Christ's obedience to God on our behalf, but by reason of our sharing in his life of righteousness. His obedience means nothing saving to us, apart from our relation to him; and his righteousness cannot be given to us, unless we are united to him. Nor has it any valency for us, unless through union with him we render a similar obedience.

Neither obedience nor righteousness by another can make us morally right with God. The indispensable requirements are renunciation of sin and coalition with Christ. As the great mediator, he both tells us what to do and how to do it. He does not effect the reconciliation; that is effected by the Father through union with the Son. But, when we put ourselves right with God through him, the wrath we bring upon ourselves vanishes, as

darkness vanishes when we step into the light. Dissolution of enmity brings immediate peace, as contact with sunshine gives immediate warmth. Hence it is utterly unscriptural to say, as certain theologians have said, that "the death of Christ is the efficient cause of reconciliation antecedently to any action on our part, or any effect produced on our minds."

In a previous chapter it was stated that nothing Jesus did was necessary to make it possible for God to forgive sin, because nothing was done, or could be done, to change his mind. But, though there was nothing Christ could do to make it possible for God to forgive, there is something we must do in order to obtain forgiveness. That which renders forgiveness possible is not the work of Christ in itself, but our relation to God in him. Hence, as there is something we must do in order to get right with him, there is manifestly an element of propitiation in atonement; for, when a sinner unites himself to God in Christ, the divine displeasure ceases to exist, because the barrier to reconciliation is then removed. The barrier being sin, the nature of the opposition needs to be explained.

Reconciliation implies opposition on both sides, of course; but the opposition, though mutual, is not identical. On the contrary, they are quite different. The opposition of man to God is the antagonism

of unrighteousness towards righteousness, whereas the opposition of God to man is the antagonism of righteousness towards unrighteousness. It is merely the necessary hostility of holiness to sin. Hence the antagonism is not similar, much less identical. In that fact lies the significance of the comment of Meyer on I. John 2:2. The propitiation there described, he says, "does not denote the reconciliation of God either with himself or with men . . . but the justification of reconciliation of the sinner with God; because it is never stated in the New Testament that God is reconciled, but rather that we are reconciled to God." When forgiveness takes place, there is a change in our personal relations, but the change is in us.

But, if reconciliation is mutual, is God not influenced by our change of relation to him? In the true sense of that term he is not. The word influence means to flow in, as the word inspiration means to breath in. God breathes into us, not we into him, and he flows into us, not we into him. In strictness, influence is used of power coming from without, though it may be used of motives viewed as forces acting on the will. Hence we should speak of an influence from God on us, or an inflowing of energy from him to us, but not of any influence from us on him. Throughout the Scriptures he is consistently described as moving

or impelling men by the energizing power of his Spirit.

Some passages represent him as being pleased or well-pleased, and others represent him as being displeased; but though such expressions are Scriptural, they do not mean that he has been influenced, since that would imply that he could be swayed by some consideration. Viewing him as our Father, it is quite proper for us to believe that when we turn to him our action meets with his approval, because it is according to his will; but our action exerts no influence on him in the sense of causing him to do what he was not always willing to do, had our relation to him permitted it to be done.

The God of the Bible does all he can for every person all the time. He does not need to be influenced, nor could we influence him, if he did. He acts of his own accord, and is moved with compassion for every one in every worthy condition. He sympathizes spontaneously with every aspiration after goodness, and recognizes immediately every impulse towards improvement. He marks every motion of the soul, and welcomes every inclination to do right. The fact that the Prodigal had repented and had resolved to make confession was sufficient of itself, the evangelist tells us, to elicit the father's forgiveness. The parable proves, also, that God regards the least desire to reform,

and accepts the feeblest effort to get right with him.

It has now been shown that atonement in man is gained by a right relation to God through Christ, and that the reconciliation is effected, not by a change made in him by the work of Christ, but by a change produced in those of us who are influenced by it; for his work is the channel, so to speak, through which, in all its fulness, the love of God is conveyed to us. Forgiveness is granted, not on the ground of his righteousness, but on the ground of our repentance; not by reason of his merits, but by reason of our morals; not because of his perfect obedience, but because of our voluntary devotion to the divine will.

The practical way of getting right with our heavenly Father is the practical way of getting right with an earthly parent, and the Scriptural view of becoming reconciled to God is the apostolic view of becoming a Christian. In II. Corinthians 5:17 Paul declares that, if any man is in Christ, he is a new being; and in II. Corinthians 12:2 he describes himself as "a man in Christ," meaning one in spiritual union with him. Hence, according to New Testament teaching, conscious atonement is mediated to us through Christ by our becoming one with him in spirit and purpose, in mind and thought, in heart and life, so that each one who is consciously reconciled may say with the apostle,

“I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me.” Through our moral oneness with him God enables us to do what, but for his mediation, we could not consciously have done. By such a oneness he becomes a living, moving force in us.

V

ATONEMENT IN SACRIFICE

EVERY standard treatise on atonement makes much of sacrifice, and, though it is a subordinate element, much requires to be made of it; but traditional theologians have misconceived its significance, and, as a consequence, have misplaced their emphasis. The bringing of an oblation was known by the Old Testament writers to be a symbolic act, and the sacrificial work of Christ was known by the New Testament writers to have an effect on man, and not on God. They knew, also, that everything pertaining to his mediatorial mission was operative only in that way.

As stated substantially in the opening chapter, atonement is chiefly used by theologians in the sense of something given to God of such a character as to procure his favour and forgiveness. The offering has commonly taken the form of sacrifice, or suffering, or something of that sort. By each of these means a man might seek to make amends for an offence, and so get right with the Being against whom he had sinned. The voluntary self-sacrifice of Jesus has long been considered an oblation to



God for the sins of mankind, though the evangelists and apostles teach explicitly that he suffered in behalf of sinners and on account of sin.

Since atonement in sacrifice has to be traced historically, an inquiry must first be made into the religious significance of sacrifice because, from a remote period in the past, sacrificial rites of one kind or another have been associated with religious worship. Such rites were originally practised by Hebrew as well as heathen worshippers, and were once thought by all classes of men to have an appeasing influence on God. Just when the Hebrews outgrew that conception is not certainly known and cannot be definitely determined.

Etymologically, to sacrifice means to make sacred, so that a sacrifice is something rendered sacred, especially to a deity. As an institution, sacrifice has both a divine and a human side, and, for that reason, has a twofold bearing—the one Godwards, the other manwards. Therefore, each of these two aspects must be independently considered. In the logical order the consideration of the manward aspect claims priority.

Finding himself dependent on the powers of nature, primitive man would sooner or later be inspired with fear or with gratitude towards the beings he conceived as operating behind those powers. Such feelings would, doubtless, manifest themselves in an endeavour either to placate or to

please those beings with offerings indicative of terror or of thankfulness, as the case might be. These offerings may not have had a strictly ethical significance.

In some such way, we may imagine, offerings of propitiation and of thanksgiving would arise; and, since the disposition to propitiate is as characteristic of people at the present time as it was in prehistoric times, propitiatory offering may have been the earliest form of sacrifice. But whatever may have been its earliest form, as a religious ceremony, it appears to have sprung from a sense of responsibility. Though, at the beginning, it may not have been connected with a consciousness of sin, a moral significance was afterwards attached to it.

When man had risen high enough in the scale of intelligence to feel answerable for his conduct, he would be driven by an inward impulse to express in outward acts his obligation of indebtedness to the divinity he revered. Hence sacrifice, like worship, seems to be instinctive in humanity. Like worship, too, it seems to be a spontaneous expression of spiritual need. The prompting to offer has always appeared as soon as men have attained a certain degree of development, and among all races that have become sufficiently developed the custom of offering has at some time or other been observed.

Having been dictated by a natural instinct, sacrifice had a human origin, and should be regarded as a human ordinance. A difference of opinion on this point has long prevailed, but modern scholars are practically of one mind with respect to it; and all students of Church history are aware that, in the main, the Christian Fathers viewed sacrifice as a human, not a divine, ordinance. But, though sacrifice is not a divine institution, as a religious rite or ceremony it has a divine element in it. Every prompting to offering something as an act of worship is of God, but the form the offering takes is always of man. In substantial agreement with this remark, Eusebius ascribes the origin of the institution to a divine inspiration, but the language used does not suggest that he thought it originated in a divine command.<sup>1</sup>

Sacrifices are enjoined in Exodus 23:14-19 and in Deuteronomy 16:2-16, but very little stress is laid upon them, and in neither book are they described as having a divine origin. They are enjoined as elements of a system of worship, not in consequence of a command from God. In other words, they are mentioned merely as parts of a religious ritual, some features of which are modified survivals of a more primitive form of sacrificial service. There is nothing in the Pentateuch, however, to imply that those who prepared the rit-

<sup>1</sup>"Dem. Evang.," I., 10.

ual viewed oblations as possessing a divine authority. They were evidently sanctioned for a temporary purpose, and that purpose was, as in the case of all other ritual observances, a disciplinary one.

God did not command sacrifice, or the offering of material objects, nor does any Biblical writer intimate a belief that he did. On the contrary, several writers state emphatically that he did not desire, much less require, external offerings. Jeremiah 7:22 represents Jehovah as saying that he had not spoken unto the fathers, nor commanded them in the day that he brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; Psalm 40:6 asserts that he has not desired sacrifice and offering, and that he has not required burnt offering and sin offering; and Psalm 51:16, 17 declare that he neither desires sacrifice nor delights in burnt offering, but that the sacrifices of God (those he approves and accepts) are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. The specific sin offering is mentioned only once in the Psalms, and then simply to show that it is not desired, as was stated in the second chapter of this work.

These Biblical statements are both clear and conclusive as to the origin of the institution in the opinion of those writers. They should not be understood as absolutely prohibiting sacrifice, however, nor should they be regarded as an absolute repudiation of sacrificial worship; but each passage

expresses the attitude of representative thinkers towards priestly ritual at the time when it was written. In this connection, it is worth remarking that no direction is given in the Decalogue concerning sacrifice, and that no mention is made of the institution among the Ten Commandments.

On the manward side, therefore, sacrifice was a material offering expressive of dependence and indebtedness, or of reverence and thankfulness, towards a power higher than human that is present in the world and operative throughout the universe. The impulse to offer something to the being he acknowledged was a sign that man desired to be on good terms with the object of his worship. Wishing to enjoy the favour of that being, he sought to establish a friendly relationship by giving to him a portion of what he had received from him; so that, in a true sense, sacrifice expressed a longing on the part of man for fellowship with God.

The significance of sacrifice on the Godward side was different among different nations, and varied with the progress of revelation. By all primitive peoples, apparently, Hebrew as well as heathen, offerings were once supposed to meet a physical need in the beings to whom they were presented. They seem, indeed, to have been originally conceived as the food of the gods.<sup>1</sup> But no Old Testa-

<sup>1</sup>See W. R. Smith, "Religion of the Semites," p. 224, Revised edition, and Skinner on Isaiah 1:11.

ment writer appears to have entertained that idea concerning Jehovah. The idea, if it ever existed among the Hebrews, was abandoned by their teachers before the time of Moses, though how long anterior to his time we do not know.

That the conception of offerings as the food of the gods was at one time prevalent is generally admitted, and that it lingered a good while in the popular belief of the Israelites is considered probable from such passages as Isaiah 1:11 and Psalm 50:13—the first of which describes Jehovah as being satiated with burnt offerings, the second of which describes him as being incapable of either eating flesh or drinking blood. The language of these descriptions is, of course, to be taken tropically or metaphorically. In each passage the speaker is reproving a guilty people for its neglect of social and moral duties, and one object of the psalmist is to show the absurdity of supposing that God has need of anything that man could give.

Certain verses also in Leviticus, such as chapter 21:6, 8, 17, which speak of offerings as "the bread" of God, should be treated in a similar way. The phrase seems clearly to be a survival from an early period when a low view of God and a gross conception of sacrifice prevailed. But the Pentateuchal, no less than the prophetic, view of Jehovah as a purely spiritual Being is inconsistent with the notion that either the Levites or the prophets or the

psalmists imagined that he required material support. In the Old Testament three stages respecting the significance of sacrifice in relation to God may be distinctly traced.

For a long time great importance was attached to the sacrifice itself. Its observance was enjoined by statute, and the laws of sacrificial service were as rigid as they could well be. Only a certain kind of object, it will be remembered, of a certain quality, could be offered, and that only after a certain fashion and at a certain time; and an atoning sacrifice could be offered only by a certain person in a certain place. The offering of a statutory sacrifice, moreover, was thought to be agreeable or pleasing to Jehovah, and the withholding of such a sacrifice was thought to be displeasing to him. Such passages as Genesis 8:21, which speaks of Jehovah smelling "sweet savour," and Leviticus 1:9, 13, 17, which speak of an offering of "a sweet savour" imply that particular emphasis was then placed on the character of the object offered.

Before we consider the next stage, it should be observed that the words, "a sweet savour," are employed anthropomorphically to indicate that an offering was graciously accepted, not to show that God was favourably influenced. In the original they signify "an odour of pleasantness," or "a pleasant odour," and the expression is a common one in the Levitical terminology. The Greek paraphrase

is used in Ephesians 5:2 of the voluntary self-sacrifice of Christ and in Philippians 4:18 of the spontaneous benefactions of Christians. In neither case, however, does it suggest propitiation, but in each case it expresses the acceptableness of the offering. Both acts were such as God approves.

In later times it was perceived that the importance of a sacrifice depended not so much on the character of the offering as on the relation of the offerer to other men. No dishonest or unrighteous person, however costly his oblations, could obtain the divine favour on account of them. Strictness in ritual could not atone for laxity in morals. The routine of sacrifice, though punctiliously observed, was nothing in itself. Destitute of purity and uprightness on the part of him who brought it, an offering was a mere matter of form; and, if anything was presented merely as a matter of form, the act was considered hypocritical and, therefore, hateful to Jehovah. It had no value and served no purpose. All such oblations were as empty as they were impious.

The prophets of the eighth century before Christ are emphatic in their condemnation of formality and hypocrisy. Jehovah regards righteousness, not ritual, Amos 5:22 teaches; he desires mercy, not sacrifice, Hosea 6:6 says; he demands equity, not ceremony, Isaiah 1:10-17 declare. The combination of ritual with immoral conduct was regarded



by these prophets as a gross insult to God.<sup>1</sup> Their statements respecting the paramountcy of moral duties express substantially the sentiments of all subsequent prophets. They contain what Oehler has termed "the programme of prophecy,"<sup>2</sup> namely, that righteous dealing, not ritual observance, is what Jehovah wants. Thenceforth the performance of ceremony without the practice of morality was held to be vain and valueless. At this stage of sacrificial teaching the greatest emphasis was placed on justice or righteousness on the part of all who worshipped Jehovah.

At a later period still it was perceived that external conformity to law was not sufficient. There had to be internal conformity, also. To offer an acceptable sacrifice one must have a proper relation to God, as well as to man. The inward spirit, not less than the outward practice, must be right. At that time there was a special insistence on inward rectitude, because it was then seen that personal purity was the only sure foundation of character, and that a man's relation to his Maker determined his relation to his fellows. As character is admittedly the mainspring of national life, personal purity would be a guarantee of public righteousness.

<sup>1</sup>The same sentiment occurs in I. Samuel 15:22, but the whole chapter appears to be out of place, and seems to reflect the thought of an age subsequent to that of Samuel.

<sup>2</sup>"Old Testament Theology," Am. ed., p. 452.

A statement in Micah 6: 6-8 illustrates the teaching of this period. In a dramatic passage, the date of which is disputed,<sup>1</sup> Jehovah is represented as complaining of neglect on the part of his people, and the people are made to plead ignorance as the ground of their neglect. Will Jehovah be pleased with a multitude of sacrifices, or even with the offering of children? the speaker asks. In reply to this question the prophet says that all Jehovah requires of them is justice, compassion, and humility; or, more exactly, to do right, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God. The last requirement, a humble walk with God, is fundamental to the other two, and regulative of them.

Some of the psalmists are equally insistent on spirituality, or inward rectitude. The author of Psalm 40: 6-8 shows that true service consists not in external observances, but in loving obedience to the divine will; the author of Psalm 50: 14, 15 shows similarly that it consists not in the material sacrifices of the altar, but in the spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving, and the author of Psalm 51: 17 shows still more plainly, if possible, that it consists not in outward offerings of any kind, but in the inward offering of the heart. Thus the importance attached to sacrifice varied from age to age, and at

<sup>1</sup>The style and structure suggest an author other than Micah, and the sentiment suggests a date later than his time.

this stage of sacrificial instruction the greatest emphasis was placed on the disposition of the heart towards God.

There was evidently a gradual development, therefore, in the Godward significance of sacrifice, the conception becoming clarified by the growth of religious knowledge. As one race of teachers succeeded another, there would be a slow advance from crudity and externality to purity and spirituality, lower ideas giving way to higher, and moral expressions of religious homage taking the place of material ones. With one accord the later prophets and psalmists emphasized prayer and praise rather than ritual and ceremony. They saw that righteousness, in the personal sense of the term, was the sole divine requirement—not merely justice between man and man, but a right state of heart towards both God and man; and that outward offerings were not simply repugnant, but intolerable, to Jehovah, unless accompanied with a reverent spirit and followed by a righteous life.

The fact that God had signally manifested his loving favour towards the Israelites during the desert wanderings, when sacrifice could not be formally offered, may have helped their teachers to perceive what the real significance of sacrifice in relation to God was. Speaking for Jehovah, Amos asks in chapter 5:25, "Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty

years, O house of Israel?" His question, which expects a negative answer, indicates that he did not consider sacrifice an indispensable element of religious service.

His view was probably shared by all the prophets that succeeded him, though some of them appear to attach even less importance than he attached to offerings. So far as is now known, neither he nor any of his successors attempted to abolish sacrifices, but thenceforward the prophets sought to put and keep them in their proper place, by associating them with the practice of righteousness in heart and life.<sup>1</sup> All who thought the people sufficiently developed to do without this symbol inveighed unceasingly against sacrifice as such and laid supreme stress on the moral demands of God.

What the predominant motive of primitive man may have been in determining the institution is quite uncertain. Like most other motives, it would, doubtless, be a complex one. The first sacrifices mentioned in the Bible are thank offerings in the form of firstfruits and of firstlings. These are described as natural expressions of thankfulness for the productiveness of the soil and the fecundity

<sup>1</sup> Smend maintains that the prophets repudiated sacrifices altogether, but Scripture warrants us only in holding that they relegated ritual to a subordinate position. See "Lehrbuch der Alt. Test. Religionsgeschichte," p. 167, Bennett, p. 11.

of the flock. In each case the offering is represented as an appropriate acknowledgment to God for his blessing, arising out of a spontaneous feeling of gratitude.

But, though that has been a controlling motive in civilized times, it is not likely to have operated so powerfully in uncivilized times. In the earlier ages, and long subsequently, sacrifices were probably regarded as gifts by which men sought to procure the favour or appease the anger of the Deity. At one time this opinion was held by the Hebrews in common with the heathen. As Schultz says, "Ancient Israel, like other nations of antiquity, believed that it could avert God's anger by sacrifices and feasts."<sup>1</sup>

Up to the period of the Captivity, apparently, a mistaken notion prevailed among the Hebrew people respecting the Godward significance of sacrifice. Most of them, no doubt, imagined that Jehovah might be made propitious by costly rites and offerings. It is questionable, however, if any Old Testament teacher gave any countenance to so crude a notion. Each knew that human favour might be purchased, but that divine favour could not be. At all events there is no proof that any representative teacher believed either that he required to be propitiated or that he could be made propitious by anything man might do.

<sup>1</sup> "Old Testament Theology," Vol. II., p. 87.

On the contrary, it has been shown, the leaders of the nation endeavoured to correct the popular misconception that offerings possessed a value in themselves. They emphasized honesty and sincerity in sacrifice, and taught that Jehovah was pleased with righteous sacrifices, or those offered in a right spirit; but they declared that outward objects were worthless to him, and that formal offerings were false offerings. Such oblations availed nothing for man and signified nothing to God. At least, they had no significance other than that of being an abomination to him. Instead of winning his favour, they only incurred his displeasure.

No matter what may have been the paramount motive in instituting sacrifice, much superstition would necessarily be associated with it. When we come to Biblical times, however, the sacrificial rites of the Hebrews present a marked contrast to those of the heathen. Among the latter, sacrifices were regarded as a means of appeasing the divine anger and of averting the divine vengeance; among the former, they were regarded as an evidence of dependence and an acknowledgment of indebtedness. In the one case, they were thought to satisfy an imaginary want in God: in the other case, they were known to express a sensible need in man. By the Old Testament writers material offerings were viewed, not as gifts whereby men rendered the

Deity propitious, nor as payments whereby they purchased the forgiveness of their sins, nor yet as performances whereby they fulfilled their religious obligations, but rather as tokens of their penitent faith in Jehovah and their sincere devotion to his service.

To the writers of Scripture sacrifices had only a symbolical significance. To them they were merely symbolic expressions of reverence and repentance, or of allegiance and love. Though many of the outer forms of Hebrew and heathen worship were very similar, the ceremonies of Judaism were fundamentally different from those of heathenism. The usages of the heathen were believed to effect a material union with their deities by a sort of magical process, but not a vestige of magic is to be found in any of the ceremonial observances of Judaism. And the same thing may be said of Mosaism, which antedates Judaism by many centuries.

On this point K. J. Nitzsch has made some excellent remarks. In a series of academic lectures, published in 1858, he expresses himself thus: "There is not a single usage in the institutions of Moses in which communion with God is effected in a magical way through the senses, but all have a purely symbolical nature. This holds good of purifications, of offerings, of sacred buildings and their construction; it holds good of

every utensil of the temple and of every action." <sup>1</sup>

The preceding paragraph calls for a brief explanation. The Mosaic ritual is not thought to have been a system of conscious symbol, in the sense that the various acts of worship were merely signs of internal things. That is to say, according to that ritual, sacrifice does not symbolize a devotion to God which takes place independently of the act of the offerer, but by his personal act the devotion of the offerer is symbolized. At this stage of revelation, therefore, sacrifice was not a mere symbol; it was rather, to speak with Oehler, "an embodied prayer." <sup>2</sup>

By the great prophets and psalmists, however, value is attached to sacrifice only so far as it is accompanied with an inward feeling of piety. To speak again with Oehler: "Mosaism says, piety approves itself in sacrifice; prophecy says, sacrifice is approved only by piety." <sup>3</sup> In all developed parts of the Old Testament sacrifice is represented as something relatively unimportant, and in no part is it represented as having any effect whatever on the mind of God, in the sense of changing his attitude. In these portions of Scripture, it is re-

<sup>1</sup>Quoted from Oehler's "Old Testament Theology," Am. ed., p. 247, note 2.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247, note 3.



garded simply as the outward expression of an inward spirit—an inward atonement, one might say.

Coming now to the New Testament, we shall find that the evangelists and apostles emphasize the very phase of sacrifice which the prophets and psalmists emphasized. They saw that oblations were only symbolic expressions of an inward atonement, or a right state of heart towards Jehovah. In Matthew 9:13 and 12:7, the only places in which our Lord is said to have mentioned the institution, he quotes and applies the language of Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice." In each place he reminds his auditors of the great principle of prophecy, that sacrifice is approved only by piety. But, in its highest signification, piety is a right state of heart towards God, and a right state of heart towards him implies a benevolent disposition of soul towards all his creatures.

Only one technical religious offering is enjoined in the New Testament, and that is mentioned formally in Hebrews 13:15. There the writer urges us to offer through Christ "a sacrifice of praise to God continually." Such a sacrifice was properly a confession of grateful acknowledgment for divine favour; and, lest any should suppose that he referred to ritual offerings, he adds, by way of explanation, "the fruit of lips which make confession to his name." In harmony with Psalm 50:14, it

is spiritual, not material, sacrifices that are meant. Praise accompanied with prayer is the nature of the thanksgiving which the author of Psalm 51:17 pronounced to be acceptable to God. The teaching of the epistle is akin to that of Micah 6:6-8.

Similar offerings, though not technically so designated, are enjoined in I. Peter 2:5, where the apostle speaks of Christians as a priesthood, consecrated for the offering of "spiritual sacrifices" that should be acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. As in the previous passage, these sacrifices of prayer and praise would be acceptable to God when offered to him through Christ, that is, with his purpose and spirit, not through the merits of his work. Coming with that spirit, every true worshipper has immediate access to God. This passage proves that in the Christian Church there is no need of a priestly order, or an official priesthood, because there is no sense in which one man is a priest other than that in which all men are priests.

When it is asserted, therefore, that our prayers and praises are so imperfect that they can be acceptable only through Christ as our intercessor, the assertion is misleading, and rests on a misconception. The intercession mentioned in Hebrews 7:25 does not imply any supplication for us on his part. The idea there is that of his ever living in the presence of God so as to interpose or operate on our behalf,

but that interposition or operation is the prolonged energy of his work and the perpetual activity of his spirit. What he does in that way has no merit for us, and no saving value to us, apart from our moral oneness with him. A proper understanding of the verse should keep us from supposing that we are forgiven in virtue of his sacrifice, or that in virtue of his intercession we are admitted to favour and grace. As the great high priest, he is our spiritual representative, but we also are true priests when we are one with him in spirit and purpose.

Romans 12:1 contains a statement that deserves to be quoted in this connection. There, in contrast to the dead victims offered under the law, we are exhorted to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and "acceptable to God." And it is significant that, in chapter 15:16, the apostle represents his office with respect to the Gentiles as that of a priest, in the sense of administering to them the gospel of God, in order to bring them by the influence of his Spirit to offer themselves a living sacrifice to him.

The language of each passage shows that, when we give ourselves to him with a pure spirit and a consecrated purpose, our offerings will be favourably received. And God would not be a perfect Father, were that not the case. These passages should have led men to see that our imperfections

do not prevent us from offering a sacrifice worthy of acceptance, and should have kept them from saying that no human offering could be received with favour, but for the sinless sacrifice of Christ. His sacrifice was representative, first, in that it was on behalf of all men; and, secondly, in that it teaches us what ours should be; but he does nothing for us that we can do for ourselves by the aid of the Divine Spirit.

As the Old Testament sacrifices were only symbols in relation to God, so they were only types in reference to Christ. But, though in a certain sense they may be considered types, we must not overlook the fact that they were involuntary offerings of material objects, whereas his was a conscious voluntary offering of himself. That difference should always be borne in mind. And, while there is no definite form of teaching in the New Testament with respect to his sacrifice, when the terms employed are properly explained there is a pretty general agreement among the writers in regard to its reason or object. He offered himself in obedience to the will of God for sake of benefiting the children of men.

Since his was a voluntary self-offering, made in devotion to the voice of duty, its significance was not perceived by his followers while he was still present with them in the flesh. This is proved by an assertion in Luke 18:34. At the close of

the third recorded announcement of the suffering and death of Jesus, referring to the twelve disciples, the evangelist says, "They understood none of these things." Mark 9:32 also asserts that they understood not what he meant when Jesus foreshadowed his death to them for the second time. Not till after his ascension did they comprehend his meaning, nor could they in the circumstances have been expected to comprehend it. That would require time.

Apart from those relating to his death and suffering, the sacrificial descriptions of his work are comparatively few. Some of them, however, are suggestive. In I. Corinthians 5:6-8, discussing the danger of a single case of immorality in a religious congregation, the apostle urges the Church at Corinth to purge itself from an evil-doer on the ground that Christ, our paschal lamb, has been "sacrificed."<sup>1</sup> Here Paul refers to the interest which Christians should have in the great sacrifice typified in the lamb of the Passover, the feast otherwise known as that of unleavened bread. Regarding leaven as a symbol of corruption, he wishes to impress the lesson of moral purity. As the Hebrew people were to remove all leaven before partaking

<sup>1</sup>The Passover was instituted in Egypt before the Levitical system was established, and, though it is called a sacrifice in Exodus 12:27 and Deuteronomy 16:2, it was not a sin offering, much less an expiatory sacrifice.

of the victim, so those who profess to be a new, regenerate society are exhorted to remove from them all sin. They are to rid themselves of every particle of impurity. The community is to be purged through participation in Christ, that is, by feeding on him in their hearts.

Speaking of the uniqueness of his offering, Hebrews 9:26 says that he was "manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself"; more exactly, for the abolition of sin, or to the end that it might be abolished. After what has been said in previous chapters, it is scarcely necessary to dwell on this clause. As in the preceding paragraph, purification is to be accomplished through participation in Christ. The one who sins must put his own sin away by forsaking it and turning to God. Christ cannot abolish sin in us, unless we die with him to sin. In other words, he can put away sin from us only by his life coming into us and his spirit taking possession of us. It was for this purpose that he gave himself on our behalf, and it is in this manner that he redeems us from iniquity, and purifies for himself a people peculiarly his own and eagerly desirous of doing good, to paraphrase the language of Titus 2:14.

It should here be explained that the blood of Christ effects in reality what the blood of bulls and goats effected only in figure. Their blood was powerless to remove sins, as Hebrews 10:4 states,

because it was only a symbol, whereas his blood secures complete and permanent removal of sin, because it represents his love to us and his life in us. As dumb victims, they could not secure peace to the worshipper with respect to the conscience, but as the life-giving spirit, he communicates life and power to all in union with him.

Then in John 1:29 he is described as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." As the appellation, "Lamb of God," has its origin in Isaiah 53:7, where the godly exiles are compared to an uncomplaining lamb, and as they are said in that chapter to have borne the iniquities of the nation in the sense of bearing the consequences of them, the verb in this verse is rendered in the margin of the New Revision "beareth," a meaning which the Hebrew equivalent justifies. But, since the Septuagint employs there another word, and does not employ the word used here in the sense of bearing sins, the verb may be rightly translated takes away or removes. With this translation agrees that of I. John 3:5, "He was manifested to take away sins," where the same verb is used and the same thought is expressed. Hence, in common with the other New Testament writers, the apostle, the evangelist, and the author of Hebrews teach us that Christ removes the sins of men by imbuing them with his spirit and inspiring them with his life.

When, therefore, the author of Hebrews 9:22 says that, "apart from shedding of blood, there is no remission," he states in sacrificial phraseology a fact based on Levitical law, the spiritual significance of which he is there exhibiting. This Levitical law was then in force among the Jews, and his statement expresses a historic fact, but not a divine necessity. According to Biblical symbolism, the blood represents the life, and the sprinkling of the blood implied that the life was thenceforth to be consecrated to Jehovah. It was not the death and suffering of the guiltless victim that procured remission for Israel, nor is it the death and suffering of the innocent Christ that procures it for us, but remission is said to be effected by the consecration of that which the blood represents, namely, the life or soul. The Old Testament writers, no less than the New, declare that forgiveness is to be obtained by the confession of our sin, and the consecration of our life to God.

Though the principle of atonement by the blood of sacrifice is admittedly obscure in the Bible, the language of Leviticus 17:11 suggests the explanation just supplied. From the middle clause of the verse, which describes the blood as given to make atonement for the people's souls (literally, to be a covering for them), some have inferred that when the blood was offered to God, it gave the sacrifice



an expiatory character; but there is not the slightest hint of expiation in that verse, nor in any other part of the book. Throughout the Scriptures it is God who is said to cover sins, or make atonement for them, and that, too, of his own accord. And the last clause of the verse tells us distinctly that the blood covers or atones by reason of the life, so that in the mind of the Levitical writer it could have had only a symbolic significance.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, when people say that there is no coming to God without an offering of some kind, or that without an offering of some kind no one can be accepted of him, it is sufficient to reply with Peter, "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." The offering of the soul or the homage of the heart, is all he wants, or ever wanted, of a human being. That is all any one could give him, as well as all he could possibly receive; and in giving that we give only what belongs to him, and what was always his. The Biblical writers recognize that sorrow for sin and amendment of life are the sole conditions of divine acceptance; but Christ and the apostles show us that to continue in his favour we must live in harmony with God, so far as we know him and understand his will.

Early in this chapter it was said that sacrifice is

<sup>1</sup>Compare Schultz's "Old Testament Theology," Vol. I., p. 385.

the rendering sacred of something to the Deity. Hence anything given to him in a right spirit may be Biblically called a sacrifice. In its highest meaning, as in its literal signification, it is merely an expression of love to God. Throughout the Bible it is consistently viewed as the outward expression of an inward spirit, that is, as symbolizing the consecration of the life and the devotion of the heart to him. Its ritual value was known to be disciplinary, and its ethical side was seen to be its all-important side. So atonement in sacrifice is figurative. God desires not to see blood flow freely, but to see life lived nobly and usefully. It is the consecration of our lives to him that he requires.

Rightly, therefore, do we regard the sacrifice of Christ as the spiritual consummation and fulfilment of the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, because it was pre-eminently one of consecration and devotion. Voluntary obedience to the will of his Father is the reason given in the Synoptic gospels for his self-offering, and a similar reason is given in the epistle to the Hebrews. Then in John 13:15 and I. Peter 2:21 an additional reason is assigned. In the gospel he is said to have served, and in the epistle he is said to have suffered, as an example for us; so that his offering was, first, a proof of his perfect obedience, and, secondly, a pattern of what ours should be.

Jesus has left us an example that we should follow in his steps. He served others self-denyingly that his disciples might do the same; he suffered patiently for well-doing that they might be ready to suffer in a similar manner for doing well; and he offered himself on behalf of all that all might possess and exhibit his spirit of self-sacrifice. It is on that ground we are exhorted in Ephesians 5:2 to walk in love with one another, manifesting a benevolence resembling that which led to him to offer himself on our behalf.

It is also on that ground that the author of Hebrews, after showing the spiritual fulfilment of Old Testament types in Christ and Christianity, counsels his readers to appreciate the privileges of the Gospel, and prove their appreciation of it by loyalty to its requirements. In chapter 13:11-16, pursuing the analogy suggested in the tenth verse between the involuntary offerings of the law and the voluntary self-offering of our Lord, he reminds them of the duty of presenting an offering similar to his. As Jesus suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people by his own blood, that is, to purify his followers through participation in his spirit, so, in a figurative sense, we are to go forth to him outside the camp prepared, if need be, to bear reproach for him.

Then he adds significantly, "Through him let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continu-

ally, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name." But praise with our lips is not enough; we must praise God also with our lives. Hence, in the following verse, the author exhorts us to be benevolent and share our benefits with others; because with such sacrifices, and such sacrifices only, is God well-pleased. In that lesson the practical teaching of the epistle culminates, its chief object being to inculcate that great truth.

The Church of which Christ is the head is to be filled with his spirit; the temple of which he is the foundation is to be built of living, consecrated men. To adapt the words of I. Peter 2:5-9, as living stones, we are to form ourselves into a spiritual house, to be a holy company of priests for the offering of spiritual sacrifices, the end of our priesthood being to show forth the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. The atoning value of such sacrifices, and, indeed, of all self-sacrifice, is known only to God. It is by the former that we live, and by both the former and the latter that we help others to live.

Thus an ancient rite was refined and purified from age to age till, in the teaching and practice of Jesus, sacrifice became absorbed in service and service lost in love. Loving obedience to God and beneficent activity for man are what the institu-

tion was designed to signify; and, so far as the Deity is concerned, that is all it was ever intended to express. To love him so and serve our fellows so is to practise his gospel and obey his law.

## VI

### ATONEMENT IN DEATH

**A**S a second subordinate element, we have next to consider the relation of death to atonement. Were it not for the prominence given to the death of Christ in Scripture and the emphasis placed upon it in theology, it would not be necessary to discuss this element at much length. But, owing to the importance attached to it by both the apostles and the theologians, a whole chapter must be devoted to a consideration of it.

There is always something impressive about the death of a godly man. It has a sanctifying effect on the community in which he lived, and exerts a consecrative influence on those with whom he was acquainted. The wider the circle of his acquaintance, the wider the extent of that influence. Hence a man conspicuous for great piety speaks more strongly after death than during life. His name becomes more generally known, and the fragrance of his character more extensively diffused.

The reach of posthumous influence depends not simply on the depth of the piety, but on the strength of the personality, or its power to project itself

into the future. Because of his unique personality, therefore, we should expect that an exceptional influence would proceed from the death of Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant and the perfect revealer of God. And such, we know from history as well as experience, has been the case. All who have partaken of his spirit can bear witness to that fact.

But, while we know that there was something exceptional in the influence of his death, we must seek to ascertain just what it was, and just what the New Testament writers teach it was; for men have believed his death to have a kind of significance which the gospels and epistles do not warrant. A value has been given to his sufferings that is out of all proportion to their importance, but a value has been given to his death that is still more disproportionate. These false estimates are due partly to a wrong interpretation of Scripture, and partly to a wrong conception of sacrifice.

Death is nothing in itself. It is simply the cessation of physical life. The last breath means no more than the last but one, nor does the last but one mean any more than the one before it. The death of a good man is merely the culmination of his life, or the culminating expression of the spirit of his life. So the death of Jesus possessed no particular significance in itself. Apart from his life, his death was nothing; it was of value only in connection with his life. And, though consecrative

in its influence, it had no saving efficacy. It expressed the dominant spirit of his life; but that was all it could express, and all the Scriptures claim it did express.

There was no more virtue, therefore, in the death than in the life of Christ; and there was no virtue whatever in the death alone. Indeed, his life and teaching are the things of paramount importance. In a certain sense, one might say that his life was his teaching, for he taught as truly by his life as by his language. A life like his was as much better than teaching as example is better than precept. He gave himself for the benefit of the world, but he did not give the whole of himself till he had expended his entire energy and uttered his expiring cry. In other words, he did not give the whole of himself till he had given his life. Hence his death was the natural consummation of his life of self-denial, and the practical demonstration of his absolute devotion to the service of humanity.

Possessing a human body, Jesus had to die. Like that of every other person, it was subject to the law of death. But his death at the time that it happened was purely voluntary. He might, doubtless, have escaped from his enemies again, as he had escaped from them before; but the hour had arrived when he felt obligated to yield to the circumstances. He was obligated, not necessitated, because his yielding was a matter of moral obliga-



tion. An occasion had arisen when he felt constrained to surrender himself, otherwise he might have prosecuted his work for many more years. Not to have yielded then, however, would have been an act of dereliction and a serious evasion of duty.

That his death at that time was only morally compulsory is suggested by the statement in Philip-  
pians 2:8, "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." The author of this statement seems clearly to imply that, as one consecrated to the service of humanity, Jesus was under a moral obligation to submit to death, even in its most shameful form, for the cause of truth and righteousness. And it is not so much his death in itself, as his readiness to die in the discharge of duty, on which the emphasis is placed, or on which special stress is laid.

Moreover, to do always the things that are pleasing to the Father, as John 8:29 represents Jesus as saying that he did, his whole life had to be one of obedience to the Father's will; and the crowning act of obedience was that of voluntary submission to death on a cross. But that death was subordinate to the dominant aim of his life, being merely incidental to the completion of the work that he was given to do on the earth.

Matthew's account of his agony in the garden

shows that he desired to live and continue his labour for mankind. It was not dread of death, nor fear of suffering, but love of life and passion for service that caused the struggle in Gethsemane. He had come, however, to fulfil a certain mission; and, having fulfilled it, he was dictated by a sense of duty to acquiesce in the Father's will by relinquishing his life. The expression in Matthew 26:39, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," was a declaration of acquiescence, or of readiness to acquiesce. He was neither a passive nor an unwilling victim, therefore, but a voluntary self-offerer of his own life.

The voluntariness of his death is emphatically stated in John 10:17, 18. In the former verse, Jesus is represented as saying that his Father loves him because he lays down his life; and, in the latter verse, as declaring that no one takes it from him, but that he lays it down of himself. Then he adds, to give a literal rendering, "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. This is the injunction I have received from my Father." According to this passage, Jesus died of his own free choice in response to a conviction of duty, or a command from God, and in so doing elicited the Father's love. Had he not acted freely, there would have been no moral quality in his death, nor any moral value in what he did. The offering of himself was thus an act of free-will,

being essential to the work of deliverance he had undertaken to perform.

But, while the time of his death was voluntary, the manner of it was necessary. He was crucified because crucifixion was then the form of capital punishment among the Romans. This mode of execution was permitted by the Roman governor in consequence of the clamour of the populace, Matthew tells us, and on a charge of sedition against Cæsar, Luke adds. Had he been put to death by Jewish law, the manner would have been by stoning, as in the case of Stephen; and, had he been executed at a later period or in another country, he might have been condemned to die in some other way. Hence his death was owing partly to choice and partly to compulsion, but it was the voluntariness of his self-offering that gave it a moral character and clothed it with peculiar power.

This is an appropriate place to answer the question, Was the death of Christ foreordained? In reply it should be said that nothing a free moral agent does is unconditionally ordained. Speaking of foreordination, the author of Romans 8:29 says that God foreordained those whom he foreknew "to be conformed to the image of his Son," which means that he foreordained all whom he foresaw would conform to the conditions of salvation. Acting in accordance with his purpose, or in compliance with his wishes, is the mark of those who

are foreknown and likewise of those who are fore-ordained. Foreordination is not an arbitrary, but a reasonable, thing; and in the Bible promise and condition go together, being always tacitly, if not explicitly, joined.

Hence the answer to the question is a simple one. Though the death of Christ was by a divine appointment, it was not by an arbitrary appointment. He had the power to act with deliberation and from choice, and the Scriptures show that he exercised both. By so doing he not only elicited the love of the Father and kept himself in his favour, but also demonstrated the duty of voluntary obedience and established the law of voluntary self-sacrifice. Many other men have died for their convictions or for their principles, but his death was a perfect expression of self-offering in obedience to the divine will; and neither before nor since has a self-offering been so consistent or so complete. His offering of himself was thus unique.

Jesus seems to have said nothing about his death till towards the close of his career, and then he did not speak of it as having any atoning effect. As the end of his life drew near, he is reported in the Synoptics to have told his disciples that he must journey to Jerusalem, and there undergo much suffering, and be condemned and put to death, and afterwards be raised up; and in chapter 18: 31 Luke reports him as saying that all things written

by the prophets concerning him should be accomplished. So far, therefore, as the record indicates, he spoke of his death as necessary to fulfil the principles of prophecy and to furnish a pledge of resurrection; and the chief emphasis is placed by each Synoptist on his being raised from the dead. This fact has great significance, and should be carefully kept in mind.

Since nothing is said by the evangelists about the doctrine of atonement, we need not look for anything in the gospels respecting death in relation to it. In the epistles, however, the references to the death of Christ are both numerous and striking. So numerous and striking are they, indeed, that most theologians have laid more stress on his death than on his life. Because of their wrong emphasis the doctrine of atonement has been seriously discredited. By an increasingly large number it is being either rejected or disregarded, and many express concerning it an utter disbelief. Let us, therefore, ascertain how the apostles viewed the death of Christ.

The first passage that speaks of any connection between death and atonement is Romans 5:10, where the writer says, "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Here we have the key to the apostolic view of the relation of death to atone-

ment. The preceding nine verses are so important that it seems best to reproduce the substance of them. Before this is done, however, it should be stated that, when Christ is said to have died "for" us, the preposition in Greek signifies on account of, on behalf of, or for the sake of. It signifies also for the benefit of, or for the advantage of.

In the first verse of the chapter, the author, including himself, refers to those whom God has declared righteous as feeling at peace with him, or reconciled to him, through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the fifth and sixth verses, he describes the love of God as filling their hearts, through the Holy Spirit which was given to them, seeing that, while they were weak, Christ died in due season on behalf of the ungodly. In the eighth verse, he asserts that God commends or makes conspicuous, his love to us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died on our behalf. In the ninth verse, he goes on to say that, being now declared righteous by his blood, more surely shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. And, finally, in the tenth verse, he adds, "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

The whole scope of this paragraph is to demonstrate the love of God in giving us Christ. It would have been a proof of his love to have given his

Son for friends, but it is a more signal proof to give him for enemies. When the writer says that we are declared righteous "by his blood," he uses sacrificial language representatively, because the blood of Christ represents his life, that is, himself. This is shown by the assertion we shall be saved from the wrath of God "through him," which means that we shall be kept from the guilt and condemnation of sin through our union with him. And when it is said that Christ died for us, or on our behalf, the emphasis is not on his dying, but on his giving himself; for his death was merely the culmination of his life, or the consummating act of his life work.

Therefore, in saying that while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, the writer means that we were reconciled to him through Christ himself; for he adds immediately, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. That is the same as though he had said, if while we were enemies, we were reconciled by what Christ had done during the days of his flesh, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by what he is now doing by the power of his spirit and the inspiration of his life. The meaning is not that by dying Jesus made a propitiation, so that, upon believing, we are declared righteous in virtue of such propitiation. That is a gross misconception, because it is never stated in Scripture

that Christ made a propitiation or that God needs to be propitiated.

As we are said in the preceding verse to be saved from the wrath of God through Christ, that is through our union with him, so in the present verse we are said to be saved by his life, that is, by being interested in it and inspired by it. And that is just what was shown in previous chapters, namely, that God reconciles men to himself through Christ. When speaking of reconciliation through him, it matters not which phrase the apostles use—the death of Christ, the blood of Christ, or the term Christ itself—they mean exactly the same thing. It is by our being united to Christ, that is, by our partaking of his spirit and participating in his life, that we are saved through his instrumentality. It is the incoming of his life and the indwelling of his spirit that saves.

On the same principle the kindred passage in Colossians 1:19-22 should be explained. This group of verses reads: "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present



you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him." The conception of reconciliation in this passage is similar to that in the foregoing one. Let us look at the correspondence.

It is God, the reader will observe, who is here said to reconcile all things to himself through Christ. Only instrumentally is Christ said to effect the reconciliation, for God is everywhere represented as doing it through him, or by means of him. The reader will also observe that it is God who is said to reconcile all things through Christ, "having made peace through the blood of his cross"; so that "through Christ" and "through the blood of his cross" are equivalent expressions. And then God is also said to have reconciled those who have been alienated and estranged from him through the "death" of Christ; so that Christ, his cross, his blood, his death stand each for the same thing, namely, Christ himself. The reconciliation in this passage extends to everything in heaven or on earth that is capable of being brought into harmony with the will of God, and all to the end that men might be presented holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him.

On the same principle, too, we should explain Ephesians 2:13-16: "But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both

one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the twain one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross." Here, as elsewhere, Christ is described as instrumentally reconciling men to God. But concerning these four verses some additional observations should be made.

Those then in Christ Jesus who were once far off from God, are said to have been made nigh to him in "the blood of Christ." In this passage "Christ Jesus" and "blood of Christ" are parallel expressions, though the latter may be viewed more as describing the manner in which they became related to Christ; for the writer means that they were brought near to God through that which the blood represents, not in virtue of the blood itself. Now the blood represents his life and all that his life signified, so that their changed relation was owing to their vital union with him and their conscious fellowship with his spirit. In this way he (and the pronoun is emphatic) became their peace, or their mediator of peace, not by assuming their penal and legal liabilities, for that is impossible in religion, but by manifesting to them the mind and will of God, and by inspiring them with a spirit of obedience and devotion to him. One may

assume physical and financial liabilities for another, but moral liabilities cannot be assumed.

By uniting men to him he becomes the mediator of peace for nations, as well as individuals; and the author of the epistle shows that he made the two great divisions of mankind, the Jews and the Gentiles, to be potentially one by breaking down the barrier that separated them, namely, the ceremonial law with its exacting injunctions and its burdensome ordinances. Thus, as men become united to Christ, they become possessed of spiritual life in him; and, so far as they possess spiritual life in him, they become reconciled to one another and to God. Such reconciliation is effected, however, not by his death, as if his death were the efficient cause of it, but by spiritual union with him; for the fifteenth verse declares that he creates in himself of the twain one new man, so making peace. It is the possession of the spirit of which his death is the proof, not the effect of the death itself, that destroys the enmity both between man and man and between man and God, though, as already suggested, there is a moral influence in his death.

There is one passage, however, which asserts that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." This assertion occurs in I. Corinthians 15: 3, where Paul is dealing with those in the Church at Corinth who had doubts about the doctrine of the resurrection. The assertion forms part

of a short summary of Christian beliefs, but it has no reference whatever to atonement. It is a simple statement of fact respecting the death of Christ, which leads to another statement of fact respecting his resurrection. The apostles, like the evangelists, regard the death of Christ as fulfilling the principles of prophecy and as furnishing a pledge of resurrection. One might be led to wonder why they made so much of his death, did one not notice that it is consistently connected in their minds with a belief in his resurrection. They viewed the crucified Jesus as their risen and ascended Lord, living in the presence of his Father and dwelling in the hearts of his followers. To them his death and resurrection go together, because the former was a pledge of the latter. It was the influence of this twofold belief that enabled them so heroically to overcome the world.

When Paul asserts that Christ died "for" our sins, he employs the preposition which signifies because of, by reason of, or on account of. Its meaning is demonstrated by a couple of passages—the one in the New Testament and the other in the Old. In Romans 5:6 Christ is said to have "died for the ungodly," that is, on their behalf or for their benefit; and in I. Kings 16:19 Zimri is said to have "died for his sins," that is, on account of his sins or by reason of them. So, according to the teaching of the Scriptures, Christ died

for the benefit of sinners and by reason of sins.

In neither case, however, is there any thought of substitution, because his death was not in our stead, but for our benefit, or on our behalf. No substitutionary death, even if such a thing were possible, could save a man from sin or make him morally right with God. In each case the idea is that of giving himself for our sake to free us from sin through our union with him. This statement is substantiated by Galatians 1:4, where it is said that Christ "gave himself for our sins (that is, on account of our sins) that he might deliver us out of this present evil world," which means to rescue us from the guilt and bondage of sin.

His dying for sins denotes the giving of himself on account of sins, and that denotes the giving of himself on behalf of sinners, or for their sake. His self-offering was a voluntary devotion of himself throughout his whole career, in order to deliver men from the evil that is in them and around them; for he was as really giving himself for men during the years of his public ministry as during the hours of his excruciating agony. He was always losing his life for others.

But his devotion of himself on their behalf was of no vital benefit to them then, apart from their interest in him, nor is what he did of any vital benefit to them now, apart from their relation to him.

It is only by our personal union with him and our conscious possession of his spirit that we can be delivered from the evil of the world, either that which is within or that which is without. His death was nothing in itself, let it be said again, but his life in us is everything, both to us and to those about us.

Because of the suffering of death, Jesus is now crowned with glory and honour, and in that experience he tasted death on behalf of every man, Hebrews 2:9 tells us. Here again the preposition shows that he died for our sake, and not in our stead. It was not in our place, but for our advantage that those blessed feet which trod the plains of Palestine were fastened to the bitter cross. Because he thus humbled himself on our behalf, Philippians 2:9-11 also tells us, God has highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above all other names, with the design that every one should worship in his spirit,<sup>1</sup> and to the end that the Father might be glorified by such an acknowledgment of Christ as Lord.

We have still to examine those passages which speak of our being redeemed by the "blood" of

<sup>1</sup> Because of his voluntary submission even to death, Jesus is exalted to unique honour and dignity that men might bow to God *in* his name, that is, with his character and spirit, not *at* his name, as if to render bodily obeisance when that name is uttered. Here, again the preposition *in* is rightly rendered in the New Revision.

Christ, or of our being bought by his "blood." In all such instances the blood is not the literal blood, but the life; and the life is not the physical life, but the spirit, that is, the spirit which took Jesus to the cross. The blood of Christ represents his perfect self-devotion to the service of humanity. When it is stated in I. Peter 1:19, therefore, that we "were redeemed" with the precious blood of Christ and in Ephesians 1:7 that we "have redemption" through his blood and in Acts 20:28 that we were "purchased" with his blood, the meaning is not that he gave anything to God for us, but that he gave himself on our behalf, or for our sake. Again, when it is said in I. Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 that we were "bought with a price," it is not meant that anything was literally paid to any one, but that it cost Jesus his life to declare unto us the whole counsel of God, that he might draw us into complete conformity to the divine will. In the same way we should explain II. Peter 2:1, which refers to false teachers who bring swift destruction on themselves by denying the Lord "that bought them."

In a similar way should be explained such passages as Hebrews 9:14 and I. John 1:7 and Revelation 1:5, the first of which speaks of the blood of Christ as purging or cleansing our consciences from dead works, the second of which speaks of his blood as cleansing us from all sin, and the last

of which speaks of our being washed or loosed from our sins by his blood. In these passages the blood is used as a symbol of purification, the sacrificial practice of the Old Testament being figuratively transferred to the Christian sphere.

As the sprinkled blood of a dumb victim represented the pure life of a guiltless animal, so the shed blood of the Lord Jesus represents the spotless life of a perfect self-offerer; and, as the blood of the victim showed what the life of the people ought to be, so the blood of Christ shows what our life ought to be, namely, one of self-dedication to God. Under the law, almost all things were purified with blood, Hebrews 9:22 affirms, because by means of it most objects were consecrated to God. Thenceforth they belonged to him, and were to be regarded as his. So it is only by our act of personal consecration that the blood is said to symbolize purging, or cleansing, or washing, or loosing from sin.

Another reference to the cleansing significance of blood occurs in Hebrews 10:22, where the language pictures certain persons as symbolically purified for the service of God by having their "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." We have an allusion there to Leviticus 16:14, which describes the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offering about the mercy-seat by the Hebrew high priest. This verse connects in thought with the verse we have just considered,



where, for Christians, sprinkling with the blood of Christ is implied, and also with I. Peter 1:2, where the expression, "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," appears in full. The idea is that, by the consecration to God of our life with the spirit of Christ, our hearts are cleansed from a sense of condemnation, or a feeling of guilt. Too much cannot be made of the blood of Christ, if we understand and recognize its figurative significance; for his blood represents something that affects our relation to God, and not something that affects God's attitude towards us. It stands for the entrance into our hearts of his pure spirit and his spotless life.

Now we may see the meaning of the encouragement given in Hebrews 10:19 to enter with boldness into the holy place by "the blood of Jesus." We enter the sanctuary with confidence, not in virtue of his blood, but with the spirit which his blood represents. The new and living way which he opened and consecrated is one of personal holiness, for entering the divine presence by his blood means that his life has entered us. His offering is nothing to us experimentally, if we do not possess his spirit. We must tread the way he trod by being crucified with him to sin.

That is why the author of Philippians 3:10 desired so earnestly to "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suf-

ferings, becoming conformed unto his death." He knew there had to be spiritual union with Christ and spiritual conformity to his death in order to participate in the power of his resurrection, or rather his resurrection life; for what he desired was something to be experienced in the present state, though in the hope, of course, that by sharing in his sufferings here he would share in his blessedness there.

A few additional remarks require to be made respecting the tropical use of the term, "cross of Christ," in Scripture. When used tropically, it is always a symbol of self-denial or self-sacrifice, not for the sake of ourselves simply, but for the sake of others, as well. Buddhism emphasizes self-denial and self-abnegation for the sake of self, but Christianity emphasizes them for the sake of service. Thereby its superiority in that regard is shown. The cross is a symbol of complete self-devotion to God for the advancement of his cause in the world.

A good illustration of its tropical use is found in Galatians 6:14, where the apostle exclaims, "Far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world." In this verse, to be crucified to the world is to become dead to it, or to anything opposed to goodness in it, just as in chapter 2:20, to be crucified with Christ is to become dead with him to all that is not

right and good. The speaker meant that through the cross, that is, the spirit of self-sacrifice symbolized by it, he was dead to everything antagonistic to God, and everything antagonistic to God was dead to him. So far as he was concerned, he desired no other glory than that of possessing and exhibiting the spirit of the cross, and he was determined by divine grace to glory in nothing else.

Generally speaking, interpretations of the death of Christ have varied according to the different view-points from which the cross was contemplated. Wherefore, it seems proper now to show that the one just presented is uniformly the Scriptural point of view. Throughout the gospels, as in Matthew 10:38, the term is a figure for bearing something patiently and self-denyingly, and implies a readiness to follow Christ at any cost; and, in the epistles, it expresses a readiness to follow him even unto death. Only the more important cases call for examination, however, and of such cases only those whose meaning might be obscure to the ordinary student.

Galatians 5:11 speaks of "the offence of the cross," which means offence arising from faith in a crucified Christ without regard to legal observances, that is, salvation through becoming crucified with Christ to sin. Galatians 6:12 speaks of being "persecuted for the cross of Christ," which means to be persecuted for that for which

the cross stands, namely, salvation through crucifixion with Christ, and not through performance of ritual. Then I. Corinthians 1:17 speaks of preaching the Gospel simply and practically, "not in wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made void," which implies that, if it were preached otherwise than in its historic simplicity, the cross would lose its significance as an agency for saving men through their becoming crucified with Christ. Dying with him to sin and living with him to God is the tropical meaning of the cross, so that it is the symbol of that which is most vital to practical Christianity, namely, something to be borne patiently or performed cheerfully throughout the entire life.

Though Ephesians 2:16 and Colossians 1:20 have already been considered, their bearing on the doctrine of the cross justifies a fuller explanation of them. The former describes Christ as reconciling men to God "through the cross," and the latter describes God as making peace "through the blood of his cross." Here "cross" and "blood of cross" are synonymous terms, representing the spirit in which Jesus offered himself, or poured out his life, on our behalf; and both are said to be instrumental in making peace, or effecting reconciliation. In each case, however, it is meant that the reconciling result is produced through the entrance into the heart of the spirit and life of Christ, as otherwise

he could not reconcile us to God, nor could we become reconciled to God by means of him.

Thus, since the death of Christ was the supreme expression of self-sacrificing love, the cross is the perpetual symbol of self-dedication to God and self-devotion to his service. So we cannot make too much of the cross either, if we recognize its figurative significance, remembering that faith in the cross is devotion to that which the cross represents, and that faith in a crucified Christ is devotion to God with his purpose and his spirit; for, as Romans 5:10 teaches, we are "saved by his life," that is, through participation in it. The incoming of the spirit of the cross effects a change and becomes a force within us. To be saved by Christ, or by his life, is to be delivered from sin through our union with him and our likeness to him. He is not a divine exemplar merely, but a mediator of spiritual life; and it is not his death, but his life, that forms the foundation of Christianity. More exactly, the foundation is Christ himself in his whole personal manifestation, as I. Corinthians 3:11 declares.

For this reason we should not separate his death from his life, nor think of his death apart from his life; because his life and death were a unity—the latter being the completion of a continuous process, namely, a career of loving and helpful service. His was a consecration unto death, and

it lasted throughout the whole period of his ministry. Hence, in strictness, the death cannot be isolated, or viewed by itself; and in Scripture it is never viewed as having any value by itself. That is to say, it is always viewed in relation to the life, or to the spirit which characterized the life; so that, as previously demonstrated, in their bearing on reconciliation death of Christ, blood of Christ, cross of Christ, and Christ himself are equivalent expressions.

What has just been said should help us to correct traditional interpretations of the death of Christ. Some of these are almost too painful to reproduce, and, as several of them are considered in the closing chapter, it is not necessary to deal specifically with any of them here. Those interpretations, however, that view his death as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, or as a substitutionary punishment for sin, should be rejected at once. Those interpretations, too, that view his death as the objective ground on which the sins of men are remitted, or that view his death and suffering as in some mysterious manner satisfying the claims of divine justice, should also be promptly rejected. We should repudiate, in short, all interpretations that view his death as having any objective influence on God, because they are all contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures.

Such phrases, therefore, as "the atoning death,"

“the atoning blood,” and “the atoning cross” of Christ are quite unscriptural, because, unless properly explained, they are misleading. Each of them suggests the idea of an expiatory sacrifice; and his was not an expiatory sacrifice, but a voluntary self-offering. Rightly explained, of course, they may be used. We should let men know, however, that we become partakers of eternal life through personal union with him; and that the only expiation required is the making of amends, so far as possible, and the overcoming of the consequences of transgression by the help of God. No New Testament writer regards the death of Christ either as substitutionary or as satisfactory or as expiatory. Since there was no influence Godwards in his life, there could not be any in his death. The notion that his death appeased the wrath of God is not a Hebrew, but a heathen, one.

Few persons now believe that his death had any effect on God, in the sense either of making him propitious or of procuring his favour; yet the question is still being asked, What has the death of Christ accomplished to make it possible for God to forgive sin? The answer is, nothing whatever, so far as God is concerned, because his work was wholly manwards. All that Jesus did to enable God to forgive sin was to induce men to come to him for forgiveness by manifesting his love and mediating his life. As the influence of his death

was manwards, so the necessity for it was on the side of mankind, too. The question also is still being asked, Could God have forgiven sin if Jesus had not died? And the answer is, there is nothing in reason or Scripture to suggest that he could not, so that the very supposition that he could not is both unreasonable and unscriptural. We look to the grace of God, and not to the work of Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins.

As the apostles knew that his death had a moral influence on man, so they knew that it had no moving power on God. But, though they knew that it had no effect on him, they both knew and taught that, besides its moral influence on man, it was an important part of his revelative and redemptive work. His death was a voluntary self-sacrifice in obedience to the divine will, by which obedience he exemplified in a pre-eminent way the principle of vicarious suffering, which is an all-important principle, inasmuch as the law of denying self for the sake of duty is fundamental to everything in Christian life. The death of Jesus was a sublime exemplification of the great rule of action that self-renunciation is the way to self-realization and self-augmentation.

Of the augmenting of himself in humanity by means of death he is reported in John 12:24 to have said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it



die, it beareth much fruit." That is the law of the spiritual kingdom, as is beautifully imaged in the vegetable world. The operation of this law, under which all men are included, is twofold: first, we must die to self in order to attain our highest development; secondly, we must die for others in order to bear spiritual fruit in them. Dying to self is the condition of actualizing our possibilities, and dying for others is the condition of multiplying our actualities. As the seed must give its life to become fruitful, we must in like manner do the same; and, as the seed by thus giving its life reproduces its kind, so we by giving our lives for others become reproduced in them.

Atonement in death is consecrative, therefore, in the sense of exerting a moral influence on human beings. It is the moral quality of his act of submitting to death on our behalf that gives the work of Christ such power to sway the world. It is the uniqueness of that act, too, which constitutes the moral attractiveness of the cross, suggested by the words in John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." The moral power of the cross possesses an attractiveness for all right-thinking men, an attractiveness that is becoming universally acknowledged. When not effectual in directly producing conversion, it influences multitudes of people to lead better lives.

There is thus a great atoning value in the death

of Christ, but not of the kind that theologians have claimed. It was their unfortunate theories that led them to pervert the teaching of the Scriptures, by reading meanings into many passages for which the evangelists and apostles were not responsible, and which they would promptly repudiate, if they were living to-day. The beneficial consequences of that death on Calvary can never be enumerated, nor can its moral power ever be made known, because influence cannot be either weighed or measured. It was divinely intended, however, to inspire not only feelings of admiration and reverence, but also sentiments of gratitude and love. And it will continue to inspire such sentiments to the end of time.

In the Scriptures two specific reasons are assigned for the death of Jesus—the one a Godward, the other a Christward, reason. Romans 5:8 asserts that God commends his love towards us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died on our behalf; and I. John 3:16 asserts that Christ has taught us what true love is by laying down his life on our behalf. So it was love that prompted God to give Christ to us, and it was love that impelled Christ to give himself for us. His death was thus a demonstration of love on the part both of his Father and of himself.

His death, however, shows us not so much what God is as what he was in relation to God, and what we should be in relation to one another; for

there is nothing that Jesus did that we are not to do, in principle, so far as we are able and circumstances may require. The aim of his work in every part was practical. The object of his death, like that of his life, was to imbue us with his spirit. Because he laid down his life on our behalf we ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brethren, says the apostle in the last verse mentioned.

The same degree of self-sacrifice is required of us that was required of him. We must be prepared, therefore, to serve or to suffer, to live or to die, in discharge of our duty for the sake of his cause. For he was delivered to death on account of our offences and raised to life on account of our being declared righteous that we might, to the utmost of our ability, do for others what he has divinely done for us.

## VII

### ATONEMENT IN SUFFERING

**D**EATH as an element in atonement was considered previously to suffering, not because it possesses a superior importance in itself, but because a greater emphasis is placed upon it in the Scriptures. More, also, has been made of it in theology. In the practical sense, however, suffering has an equal, if not a superior, atoning value, as will presently be shown. A few pages must first be devoted to some general observations on the subject of suffering.

The existence of suffering has long been viewed, especially by religious people, as a problem. There are persons, doubtless, to whom the problem has never seriously appealed; but those who have not felt its pressure have either not thought much about it or not had much experience of pain. By some men suffering is regarded as a mystery, but a little reflection will show that it is rather a necessity than a mystery.

Up to quite recent times it was customary to think of suffering as having its origin in sin. In many quarters it is still customary so to think.

Much suffering is undoubtedly due to sin, and what the wicked suffer may be principally owing to it; but, though it is often owing to transgression, that is not the primal or fundamental cause. The fundamental cause lies in the constitution of man. Suffering comes from imperfection, and imperfection from limitation, and limitation from finiteness.

John 9: 3 corrects the ancient belief that a physical defect is always a consequence of sin, and forbids by implication the assuming of a necessary connection between suffering and sin. "Neither did this man sin nor his parents," Jesus is reported to have said respecting a man who had been born blind, meaning that neither his sins nor those of his parents were the cause of his misfortune. His blindness was owing to natural, and not moral, causes. Suffering is not necessarily a proof of sin by any one. It is rather a mark of frailty or infirmity.

Then, besides what comes from weakness and imperfection, we bring a good deal on ourselves through ignorance, indiscretion, and indulgence; and besides what comes in each of these ways, a good deal is brought upon us through our connection with others. So suffering arises partly by reason of our finite natures and partly by reason of our social relations. There is thus no mystery about it. It springs naturally from conditions that belong necessarily to life.

Springing from conditions that are both natural and necessary, it is something that pertains to sentient beings. Hence all conscious creatures must suffer to a greater or lesser extent, either on their own account or on account of others. No one is wholly exempt from it, but sooner or later every one has some acquaintance with it. We should not be surprised, therefore, at having to bear more or less pain, because a measure of it is inevitable.

Notwithstanding its naturalness, however, suffering is the occasion of scepticism to many and of perplexity to many more. To them it argues limitation and imperfection in the Deity, and its prevalence makes them doubt his goodness or distrust his ability. Failing to look for its origin, they conclude that he is either not all-mighty or not all-merciful, thus assuming him to be either limited in power or deficient in love. But to assume such an alternative is unreasonable. Suffering is a part of the divine order, and is inseparable from the present state. It has several significant uses, too, and serves, at least, a threefold purpose.

In the first place, suffering is admonitory. Pain warns us of danger or disease, or possibly of both. It shows that there is trouble somewhere, and that things are not working smoothly. It is generally an indication of disorder, and is always an evidence of disturbance either from within or from without.

An aching nerve or a twitching muscle informs us that something is not right, or not normal at least, because nerves were not made to ache, nor were muscles made to twitch; and the same thing is true of every part of our complex structure. No organ was formed for giving pain, and all healthy persons are comparatively exempt from it. Freedom from suffering is the rule, and pain is the exception. Discomfort of any kind, indeed, is so exceptional as to be a sign of more or less derangement.

In the second place, suffering is disciplinary. Being a sign of derangement or disturbance, it tells us to look for what is wrong, to ascertain, if possible, the cause, and then to seek for some means of removal. It is thus a providential method of discipline. Many of the most valuable lessons that we learn in life are taught in the school of suffering. "As darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day," so suffering teaches lessons we learn in no other way. Jesus "learned obedience by the things which he suffered," Hebrews 5:8 says; and good men in all ages have similarly learned not obedience merely, but devotion to the divine will.

In the third place, suffering is corrective. It exerts a wholesome influence on us by making us more careful of ourselves. Having discovered that a certain course of action, or a certain mode of life, has injured us, we shall, if we are rational,

change our course of action or correct our mode of life. In other words, we shall endeavour to keep from doing what we know will work us harm and give us pain. A wise man will abstain from that which tends to injure him, and will avoid both danger and disease, so far as duty will permit. Hence suffering may produce in men a beneficial result. Since it comes so frequently from the conscious violation of known laws, it should lead us afterwards to observe them the more faithfully. Doing that, we may derive some profit from each painful experience of transgression that is not wilful or deliberate.

Its uses prove that pain may be a friend, and not a foe; though, if we transgress too often or too long, it may become a foe. Even then it is the violation of law that is the foe. When we regard it rightly, however, instead of being an evil, it is a positive good. Designed to serve a threefold purpose, it is permitted because in the nature of things it has to be. That is to say, it comes as a natural consequence, not as a divine infliction. God does not send suffering, but simply permits it. As Lamentations 3:33 affirms, "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." And the term translated willingly means "from the heart," which is a Hebraism for "with intention or design."

Hence people should not think hard of him for



permitting what must come. Much less should they think he is dealing hardly with them, if it do come. Much less still should they let it lead to a hardening of heart towards him when it does come. For, if we bear what we experience of it with a proper spirit, we may always turn it to a practical account; because what God permits he can bless, and what he allows to happen he can overrule, or help us overrule, for good. Borne with patience and submission, it will beget sympathy, produce sweetness, and develop moral strength. Being a means of development, it may fit us for higher duty, finer service, and greater usefulness.

Thus the existence of suffering is susceptible of easy explanation, and the ways of God in regard to it are capable of complete vindication. There is nothing mysterious about it, because it springs from circumstances which, if we cannot always justify, we can always explain. Therefore, when we feel grieved at the extent of suffering, we should remember that much of it is inevitable, that much of it is preventable, and that all of it is righteously permissible; when we find ourselves becoming cold and sceptical because of what we suffer, we should bear in mind that God is not to blame, nor in any way responsible; and, when we see others growing hard and rebellious under affliction, we should show them the unreasonableness of such a spirit, and should encourage them with the assurance that,

though chastening seems for the present to be not joyous, but grievous, yet, afterwards, to those who have been exercised by it, it yields peaceable fruit, even the fruit of righteousness, as the author of Hebrews 12: 11 says.

But this discussion is concerned with the ministry of suffering merely as it relates to the doctrine of atonement. So, having in a general way considered its beneficial results, we have next to consider in a more specific way its atoning effect—first, on those who suffer for themselves; and, secondly, on those who suffer for others.

Suffering serves, it has been stated, to admonish, to discipline, to correct. So far as it leads to correction, it becomes atoning in its influence, because it tends to reconcile the sufferer both to himself and to his condition; but the influence is strictly atoning only as it yields the fruit of righteousness, or produces conformity to the will of God. Whenever conformity is produced by suffering that is borne with a submissive spirit, the influence is atoning in the evangelical signification of the term. Such suffering is a powerful factor, not only in bringing people to their senses, but also in removing estrangement and effecting reconciliation. Multitudes of men and women have been influenced by it to confess their sins to God and ask for his forgiveness.

An excellent illustration of its atoning influence on the individual is furnished by the parable of

the Prodigal Son. When the young man there depicted had wandered far and suffered much, he is described as coming to himself and as resolving to return to his father. It was suffering, the Master intimates, that brought him to a knowledge of himself. It was want and destitution that made him feel his sinfulness and realize his alienation and long for restoration to his father's favour. Thus the story serves in a figurative way to show the value of suffering as a means of atonement in the case of those who suffer for themselves.

Our sufferings, however, may have an atoning effect on others. That is the aspect of the subject which requires particular consideration. Most persons recognize the power of suffering to produce reform in those who bear it for themselves, but its effect on those for whom it is borne is not so generally recognized. At all events, its reconciling value is not so generally appreciated, nor so accurately understood. Hence a complete account of suffering for others must be presented.

To bear something for another is technically termed vicarious suffering, and is properly expressed in English as suffering for another. But the word "for" in that phrase is ambiguous. It suggests the notion of substitution, and is commonly so explained. That explanation, however, is erroneous, because neither in Hebrew nor in Greek does the particle thus translated warrant it.

There was no such thought in the mind of any Biblical writer, as a literal rendering of the passages supposed to teach substitutionary suffering would plainly show. Even the English word itself does not necessarily suggest substitution. Its original sense is beyond or before, and in general it indicates reason or cause.

A good Biblical example occurs in Isaiah 53:5, the first half of which is rendered by the Revisers, "He was wounded *for* our transgressions, he was bruised *for* our iniquities." Though the English preposition does not necessarily suggest instead of, or in place of, it has generally been taken to have that meaning in this famous passage; but in both Hebrew and Greek the particle it represents signifies because of, or on account of. And, in every other passage that seems to suggest the notion of substitutionary suffering, the preposition both in Greek and in Hebrew has a similar signification. There is no exception in the Bible, so far as vicarious suffering is concerned. Hence the clause would be better translated, "He was wounded *because of* our transgressions, he was bruised *because of* our iniquities," as that rendering removes the ambiguity.

The reference in that passage is to the trials of the Jewish Church in Babylon. The prophet is describing the way in which the loyal Israelites suffered by reason of their disloyal brethren during

the period of the Exile; and the thought in his mind was that of certain persons participating in painful or unpleasant consequences on account of certain others, and for their advantage. The terms used in the preceding verse prove this assertion to be correct. "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,"<sup>1</sup> the prophet says, referring to the suffering Servant of Jehovah, or the Jewish Church, in captivity. The words "borne" and "carried," are synonyms suggesting, not to take away, but to take up or bear. The idea expressed is that of bearing the consequences, namely, the consequences of others' sins.

The Scriptural force of the latter term is exhibited in Lamentations 5:7, where the writer, referring to the Israelitish nation, says, "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities," meaning that the children had borne or carried the consequences of their fathers' sins. Participating in consequences is the idea in every passage where the word occurs in connection with bearing or suffering on account of another. It is a law of God, and one which should create no difficulty to a thinking person, that the consequences of the sins of parents should be transmitted to their offspring. If their iniquities could

<sup>1</sup> More literally, "Surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our diseases," for physical as well as mental pain is meant.

not be transmitted, neither could their virtues be; but children are both cursed by the vices and blessed by the virtues of their parents. The law of heredity, like every other law of nature, is a righteous law.

The import of the word vicarious must also be evinced. Though it is occasionally used in a substitutional sense, that is not its literal meaning. It is derived from a Latin term denoting change or interchange. The base of the term appears in such words as "vicar," "vice-consul," "vice-president,"<sup>1</sup> each of which denotes one who shares the duties, or interchanges the functions, of an office with another. Vicarious means sharing or participating in something. The original idea of the root in its various combinations is that of participation, not that of substitution; so that vicarious suffering is not substitutionary, but participative, suffering. It is sharing something with another, or participating in something on another's account.

Sometimes people wonder why we should have to suffer on account of others, but there is really nothing strange about the necessity. There is no more mystery about suffering for others than about

<sup>1</sup> A president is always a president, whether in the chair or out of it, whether at home or abroad; so that a vice-president does not, strictly speaking, take his place, but merely shares the office with him. The same might be said of each of the other terms in which the base appears.

suffering for ourselves. Society is an organism; and, as the different parts of the body are knit together by tendons and ligaments, so human beings are united by social and domestic ties. Hence what affects one in some measure affects all. In a very significant sense we are, in spite of ourselves, members one of another; and, therefore, are compelled to suffer more or less, not only on account of others, but also for their sake. Owing to our intricate relationships, there is an interconnection one with another and an interdependence one on another; so that a community, as well as an individual, may have to suffer by reason of sins for which it is not responsible. Because of association and organization, the innocent must suffer both with and for the guilty. Thus the apparent mystery of suffering on account of others vanishes when we consider the solidarity of the race.

Broadly speaking, our very existence is in many respects vicarious, and we are constantly required to bear something on account of those about us. The notion of solidarity is so deeply rooted in experience that, in one way or another, it has been recognized from very ancient times. Its form has been modified, however, with the lapse of centuries. In the earliest known form it was viewed as suffering because of the sins of ancestors, and among the Hebrews there was an old proverb to that effect. 'According to Ezekiel 18:2, the exiles in Babylon

were accustomed to say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." This proverb was used, the prophet tells us, concerning the land of Israel. Jeremiah 31:29 refers to a similar use of it. So it appears to have been a popular way of accounting for national disaster, for it is quoted in connection with the misfortunes of the nation. The exiles threw the blame for their captive condition on their forefathers, as Lamentations 5:7 also shows.

Though the proverb was too freely used and its principle too sweepingly applied, it, nevertheless, contained a good measure of truth; because, as already stated, by the law of heredity children do bear the consequences of their parents' sins. Therein lies the significance of the declaration of the Decalogue, that God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations. But, sinful as Israel's ancestors had been and serious as were the consequences of their sins, they were not alone to blame for the afflicted condition of the exiles; and Ezekiel reproved his people for their lax use of the proverb, by proclaiming and enforcing the doctrine of individual responsibility. "As I live, declares the Lord Jehovah," he says, "ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel"; because, as he adds in the same connection, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."



From what has been said it is manifest that a community, no less than an individual, may have to bear the consequences of the sins of others. But bearing the consequences of others' sins is not vicarious in the technical sense of the term. In a general sense, participating in unpleasant consequences of any kind may be called vicarious; but, strictly speaking, to be vicarious such participation must be for a purpose or with a result. In a technical sense, the word means participating in something uncomfortable on account of others and for their sake. That suffering alone is properly called vicarious which is borne by reason of another and for his advantage.

Such suffering, moreover, is not vicarious in the ethical sense, unless it be voluntary on the part of those who bear it. If we bear something on account of others involuntarily, what we suffer has no moral quality at all. It acquires that quality only when a conscious purpose is to be served. There must be voluntariness in suffering to give it a positive moral character. In the full sense, therefore, to suffer vicariously is, of one's own accord, to bear unmerited pain or loss on account of another and for his sake. That sort of suffering exerts a potent influence on those for whom it is borne—an influence that is both remedial and redemptive.

In cases of trial or affliction it is remedial. What

we bear for ourselves may be of great value to us, but what we bear for others may be of greater value to them. For them to know that we are thinking of them and feeling for them in their troubles has a soothing influence on them, and yields them a measure of relief. True sympathy, however, feels with as well as for those in distress, and tends not only to soothe and mitigate, but also to comfort and invigorate. It assists them to be patient and reflective, submissive and resigned. Sympathetic aid has always been a useful means of helping the unfortunate to be brave and strong. Its effect, moreover, is frequently atoning, and sometimes to a notable degree.

In cases of sin and crime vicarious suffering is redemptive. The knowledge by a bad man that some one is suffering for him influences him favourably, as a general thing. It makes him feel his guilt and realize his fault in a peculiar way. It has a power over him which nothing else can have. It is thus an effective means of causing men to repent and reform. Even when it does not produce a permanent change for the better, the influence may be very beneficial. But, so far as it induces them to improve in any respect, or to any extent, it is redemptive, whether it leads to full reformation or not; and, in many cases, it brings about complete amendment of life.

Bad men are often benefited more by what good

men suffer for them than by what they suffer for themselves. That fact is so apparent that it needs no comment. Very often, too, the good suffer more than the bad before the bad are led to repent and reform. That which a father or a mother feels for a wayward daughter or an erring son may be beyond comparison greater than that which the wrong-doer feels. The friends and relatives even may feel the disgrace more keenly for a time. In short, that which the innocent suffer on account of the guilty is generally greater at first, because while the latter remain impenitent, the former suffer in a more painful way.

The godly exiles in Babylon were involved in the chastisement of the ungodly, and endured great hardships by reason of them, but they suffered much more than the ungodly, because they suffered for righteousness' sake; whereas the ungodly yielded to their surroundings and adopted the practices of the heathen, thus making it harder for their brethren and easier for themselves. But, painful as the experience was and protracted as the sufferings were, they bore everything with patient courage; and by so doing were instrumental in reconciling thousands of rebellious Israelites to Jehovah. They suffered long enough to make the rebels feel their guilt and realize their need of getting right with God.

What we suffer by reason of another does not

keep him from suffering at the same time, of course, because each one must bear the penalty incurred by his offence. "Every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge," Jeremiah 31:30 declares. The wrong-doer carries a burden of his own which no one can bear for him or share with him; but, while he is bearing his load of guilt and regret, we may so participate in his condition as to relieve his pain and lighten his load. Vicarious suffering, though participative, is natural, not penal; and sympathetic, not moral; for neither sin nor guilt nor moral penalty can be transferred. It is a voluntary bearing of something for the sake of another, not by suffering in his stead, but by enduring on his behalf.

Though we may conduce to the relief of another, we cannot share in the desert of his transgression; nor can we suffer for his sin, except in the participative or consequential sense. There is no such thing as vicarious punishment, or substitutionary suffering, for moral penalties of any kind. We cannot suffer moral loss for another, nor can another suffer moral loss for us. All that we can possibly do is to suffer sympathetically and participatively, and that is all that Jesus did, and all that he is said in Scripture to have done. Ezekiel saw the absurdity of supposing otherwise, when in chapter 18:20 he asserted, "The soul that sinneth, it

shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Instead of being meaningless or mysterious, therefore, suffering has a manifest and profound significance. It plays a very important part in the moral development of humanity. Our afflictions are designed to benefit others, as well as ourselves. Many centuries before Christ the canonical prophets perceived that, in the order of Providence, a judicial purpose might be served by temporary chastisement; and, from the time of the Babylonian captivity, it was seen that the sufferings of good men may have a beneficial effect on bad men, and a redemptive value for them. For, according to the prophet of the Exile, it was the unmerited sufferings of the righteous Israelites during their term in Babylon that formed the atoning element in bringing the rebellious Israelites to rededicate themselves to Jehovah; and it was through those unmerited sufferings, he intimates, that supreme blessing was to come to mankind.

His prophecy was almost literally fulfilled. By enduring patiently the hardships of the Exile, the loyal part of the nation suffered not only for the benefit of the disloyal part, but also for the benefit of mankind. What the former bore resulted, first,

in many of the latter being led back to the worship of Jehovah; it resulted, also, in the captives being providentially restored to Palestine; it resulted, afterwards, in the gradual spread of monotheism among the surrounding nations; it resulted, finally, in the preparation of the ancient world for the coming of Christ and the founding of Christianity. So all who have received the Gospel have been benefited by what the godly exiles suffered in Babylonia, and all who may yet receive it will be similarly benefited by what they then endured.

It has seemed best to dwell at length on the nature of vicarious suffering, and to show its significance by some Old Testament examples, because the New Testament passages bearing on the subject are based upon prophetic usage. Most of them, moreover, are taken from the passion-prophecy contained in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, as will presently appear. We are now ready to examine the chief passages that speak of the sufferings of Christ.

Before we deal with them, however, the reader should be reminded that it was not till after his departure that his disciples perceived any particular significance in the things which he suffered. Besides what Luke tells us in chapter 18:34, John 12:16 says that it was not till "Jesus was glorified" that they remembered the things that were written concerning him by the prophets. For this reason, the evangelists say very little about his suf-



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fering, and what they do say has reference partly to that which he bore as a healer or helper, but principally to that which was incidental to the prosecution of his mission. Only what is said in the former respect requires to be explained, as what is said in the latter respect explains itself. There are but two passages in the gospels to be examined.

In chapter 8:17, referring to the way in which Jesus helped those who were brought to him for healing, Matthew observes, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases." These words are a reproduction of Isaiah 53:4, which describes the voluntary endurance of the Jewish Church in captivity, when the godly exiles suffered on behalf of their rebellious brethren; and they are said to have been fulfilled by Jesus, because he realized in a special way the principle of participative suffering contained in the passage. He dealt sympathetically and practically with those afflicted persons by compassionately removing their diseases, so that his suffering was vicarious in the sense of bearing on account of others and in their behalf. Though the language is appropriately used of him, it is applied in an accommodated sense, but with a lower meaning than it has in the prophecy, as Wesley remarks; because the godly exiles suffered literally for the ungodly, whereas Jesus is here shown to have suffered only by sympathy.

In chapter 24: 26, 27, alluding to such Old Testament passages as were then supposed to refer to a suffering Messiah, Luke represents the risen Lord as saying to two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, "Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Then, in the forty-sixth verse, the evangelist represents him as saying at a later hour to a company of disciples in Jerusalem, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer." Luke attaches no particular importance to the sufferings in anything he reports, but merely asserts that there was a moral necessity for him to execute his mission, by fulfilling the principles of prophecy before entering into his glory. Since there is no prophecy of a suffering Messiah in the Old Testament, the things which Jesus is said to have interpreted concerning himself were applicable to him only in a typical or spiritual way. In no other way would it have been correct to assert that the Christ should suffer. And all that he is said by any evangelist to have suffered was in obedience to the divine will and for the advantage of the human race.

The first important passage in the epistles respecting his sufferings is Hebrews 9: 28, where the writer, adverting to the fact that it is appointed unto

men once to die, speaks of Christ as "having been once offered to bear the sins of many." These words are a paraphrase of Isaiah 53:12, and are applied in the same way as those quoted by Matthew from the fourth verse. As the godly exiles bore the consequences of the nation's sin and suffered on behalf of the nation, so Jesus bore the consequences of the sins of mankind and suffered on behalf of the world. In each case it is the doctrine of voluntary suffering for the sake of sinners that is meant.

The second important passage is in I. Peter 2:24. Translated accurately, the first sentence would read, "He himself carried our sins in his own body up to the wood," meaning the cross. Here, as before, the language of the passion-prophecy is applied to Jesus in a typical way; and the idea is that, as the godly exiles bore consequences of sin which took them to the grave, so Jesus bore consequences of sin which took him to the cross. Peter knew as well as we that sins cannot be literally transferred. Hence all that Christ is said to have carried up to the cross was the spirit of voluntary self-sacrifice, or a willingness to suffer and die on behalf of mankind. And the apostle commends what he did on two practical grounds: first, that of a pattern for imitation—he suffered on our behalf, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps; second, that of an inducement to self-consecration—he went to the cross that we might

die to our sins and live unto righteousness. The context is full of instruction. The special aim of the apostle was to impress upon servants the lesson of moral integrity.

One more passage in the same epistle remains to be examined. Speaking of the providential necessity of suffering, Peter enforces the duty of patient endurance under all circumstances by reminding his readers of the most powerful consideration he could urge, namely, the example of our Lord. We should suffer for right-doing rather than wrongdoing, he says in chapter 3: 18, because, to give an accurate rendering, "Christ also suffered once on account of sins, a righteous one on behalf of unrighteous ones, that he might bring us to God." Again the apostle indicates that what Jesus suffered was by reason of sins and on behalf of sinners. As was said in substance in a previous chapter, it cost the sacrifice of his life to reveal the whole will of God, and to reconcile all men to him. Everything he did was done with that twofold object, to the end that each of his disciples might do the same.

Christ *also* suffered, the apostle says; and the adverb is significant. It suggests a resemblance between his sufferings and ours in the work of bringing men to God. What he suffered on behalf of us we should be prepared to suffer on behalf of those about us. It suggests further that he suf-

ferred as all consecrated persons might have suffered, had they been similarly situated. Because of his unique relation to humanity, we can never know the wide-reaching influence of his sufferings or the wide-reaching extent of their influence, but we may gather from Scripture that what he suffered was the same in kind as that which all Christians should be ready to suffer for any meritorious cause. Without the possession of such a spirit, we can neither participate properly in the sufferings of Christ nor understand experimentally the blessedness of those who are compelled to suffer for righteousness' sake.

Thus in every passage it is the consequences of sin that Christ is said to have borne, and those are the only things that he could bear, so far as human transgressions are concerned. He suffered vicariously, because he suffered sympathetically and participatively, and he could not suffer for sinners in any other way. No sin was literally laid on him. Men are healed by his stripes through being benefited by what he endured on their behalf; for offences may be expiated in part by what people suffer for themselves, and in part by what others suffer for them. It was in this latter manner that healing came to the rebellious Israelites through the trials and hardships of the obedient Israelites in captivity. The sin of the nation was expiated, the prophet of the Exile teaches, through the voluntary

endurance by the loyal Israelites of the chastisement that was necessary, not to influence God to forgive their disloyal brethren, but to make them realize their guilt and feel their need of forgiveness.

If some one should ask what are the consequences of sin that one bears for another, the answer is, pain and suffering and unjust treatment. If one should ask how Jesus, being sinless, bore consequences of sin for the world, the answer is, by sympathizing with men in their condition, by participating in their sorrows and struggles, by enduring hardship or discomfort on their account and in their behalf. Should one inquire how sinners are still benefited in virtue of what he endured in their behalf, the answer is, by being impressed with the nature of divine love, by being brought to feel their need of forgiveness, and by being led to repent and reform. Great as was the redemptive value of the vicarious suffering of the Jewish Church, the redemptive value of his suffering is as much greater as he was greater than any who had come before him, or than any who may come after him.

The suffering, like the death, of Jesus was a moral necessity. Two generic reasons for that necessity are given in the New Testament. According to I. Peter 3: 18 it was necessary to bring us to God. The need in this respect has been fully explained. Then, according to the ordinary English rendering

of Hebrews 2:10, it was necessary to make the author of our salvation "perfect"; but, according to a more adequate rendering, it was necessary to bring his work to completion. This may be shown by a literal translation of the last clause. Instead of saying, "To make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings," we should say, "To make the leader of their salvation accomplish his end through sufferings."<sup>1</sup> The preposition here expresses the circumstance of an action, or the manner in which a thing is done; and the thought seems clearly to be that, as the leader of our salvation, it was fitting that he should be required to accomplish the end for which he came with the accompaniment of sufferings.

We may now see what the Scriptural conception of his suffering is. By his voluntary endurance of persecution and pain on behalf of mankind, he demonstrated the individual duty of complete devotion to the divine will and the redemptive value of vicarious self-sacrifice. Thus the horrible notion that he appeased the divine anger by his excruciating suffering and his ignominious death, has no foundation whatever in the Scriptures. Nor is

<sup>1</sup> See Greek Testament, by Webster and Wilkinson.

A similar use of the word translated "perfect" in the English versions occurs in chapters 5:9; 7:19. In each passage the idea is that of accomplishing an end or of bringing something to completion.

there any foundation in them for another horrible notion, that Jesus endured in his own person that which our sins deserved.

Men may have been influenced to entertain the latter notion by assuming that the goat sent into the wilderness, symbolically laden with sin, was made to suffer there what was due to the sinners themselves; but the sins figuratively laid upon its head were simply supposed to be removed from contact with the people. There is no hint of the idea in the Bible, much less any warrant for it, that the goat was to perish in the wilderness after suffering the sinful deserts of the community. Neither is there any hint in the Bible that Jesus suffered in himself the stroke which would otherwise have fallen upon us. That is theology, but not Scripture.

He did not suffer a single pang that was not morally necessary in the circumstances; that is, in order to fulfil his mission and finish the work he was given to do. He had to suffer as he did to achieve the results that have accrued; but we should be careful not to magnify his sufferings unreasonably and unscripturally, as many have magnified his anguish on the cross. To believe him to have been in a state of conscious abandonment by the Father because, before dying, he is said to have uttered the initial words of the twenty-second Psalm, is to believe what has no basis in either rea-



son or Scripture. His expiring cry arose from an experience of physical rather than spiritual darkness. That is the way, indeed, in which the psalmist used the words. God did not, and could not, abandon his well-beloved Son. The suggestion that he had to endure the desertion of the divine presence, or the withdrawal of the Father's favour, should never have been made.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking in chapter 1 : 24 of his share in religious work among the Colossian Christians, Paul rejoices in his sufferings on their behalf, because he is able thus to fill up on his part "that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ." There are sufferings for the men of each generation to fill up for the cause of Christ, and there will always be something wanting to complete the afflictions endured by him. As the apostle rejoiced to supplement those afflictions for the people of his day, so we should rejoice to supplement them in like manner for the people of our day.

To suffer profitably for ourselves is well, but to suffer profitably for others, too, is better. If our sufferings contribute to the development of character in us, the result is good; but, if they contribute to the development of character in those about us, the result is glorious, for therein God is glorified by means of us. Nothing is too hard to be borne

<sup>1</sup>Luke 23:46 affirms that he died in conscious favour with the Father.

if, by bearing patiently, we may diffuse the gospel of Christ among those who have not heard of him or, having heard, have not acknowledged him as their Lord.

We should never forget, however, that all who are willing so to suffer as to lead men to God may help, not only to make Christ more widely known, but also to fill up that which is lacking of his afflictions for the age in which they live. And no greater encouragement should be required. Since, then, Christ suffered for us in the flesh, we should arm ourselves likewise with the same mind; for supplementing what he suffered in order to advance his cause, is the practical lesson which his passion is designed to teach.

## VIII

### ATONEMENT IN SERVICE

**F**ROM considering the element of suffering we come logically to consider that of service, for the one follows naturally from the other.

At first thought service might not seem to be an element in atonement, but on second thought it will be seen to be a very important one. Though its importance has been largely overlooked, all that has been said of the nature of suffering for others may be said of the value of service for them, and a good deal more.

In a true sense that which brings estranged parties together is an atonement. Anything, therefore, that makes God and man one, or that helps to harmonize man with God, may be called an atonement. Strictly speaking, of course, it is only a means of atonement; but whatever tends to remove estrangement between man and his Maker is a means of atonement. The exhortation to the brethren in Galatians 5:13 to serve one another with love, or in the exercise of love, suggests that voluntary servitude is a practical means of developing in men a proper disposition.

There is nothing in the New Testament that bears directly on the subject of atonement in service, though there is much that bears upon it indirectly. Several times already we have met the thought of service in connection with the mission of Christ, not as technically related to the doctrine of reconciliation, but as practically related to the communication of his spirit in order to get his followers wholly right in heart. All that he did in bringing them into harmony with God, by revealing his will and expressing his character and proclaiming his love, was essentially and emphatically service.

In Luke 22:27 he is represented as saying to his disciples that he is among them as one who serves. There is a possible reference there to the ceremony of the feet-washing recorded in John 13:14-16; but, whether there is an actual reference or not, the remark describes the general character of his work on earth, which was not simply mediative, but ministrative. What is said about him there corresponds with what is said about him in Philippians 2:7, where he is described as assuming the form of a servant, and as leading a life of self-sacrifice for men in obedience to the Father's will.

The very purpose of the ceremony mentioned was to give his disciples an object-lesson in humble or lowly service. As he had done to them, so he desired them to do to one another, not in the literal way only, for that was a custom of the time, but

in the practical way of serving usefully and helpfully. By that act he exhibited the spirit with which they were to act. A disciple is not above his teacher, Luke 6:40 reports him as saying on another occasion, but every one who is "perfected," or "perfectly trained," shall be like his teacher. Mutual service, mutually helpful service conducive to the purifying of the heart, is the truth inculcated; for his act was symbolic, not merely of humility, but of purification.

This outward washing was a symbol of inward cleansing. It symbolized the cleansing of the soul from sin. The practice was an ancient and prevalent feature of Eastern hospitality, but the lesson taught was that of self-humbling and soul-cleansing service. The phrase in I. Timothy 5:10 with regard to washing the saints' feet, seems to have been used by the writer to enforce the same lesson and inculcate the same truth; for it occurs in connection with the things that should characterize a woman who was properly accredited in the matter of good works, such as bringing up children, showing consideration to strangers, relieving people in distress, and devoting herself to every kind of good employment. By the symbolic act recorded in John's gospel we are taught to guard against self-seeking, and be ready to render disinterested assistance.

Unselfish service is more explicitly set forth in

Matthew 20:24-28 and Mark 10:41-45, where Jesus is said to have called to him his disciples, some of whom were clamouring for superiority of office or rank, in order give them a lesson in humility. We are there shown that greatness depends not on place or position, but on character and conduct, and consists not in seeking preferment for ourselves, but in performing work for others. The dignity, one might say the divinity, of such work is illustrated by the example of Jesus, for each of these evangelists tells us that the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. Those passages indicate that self-denying service is the essence of Christianity, and that the more ready we are to serve with his spirit, the more do we become like Christ. The supreme test of greatness is a willingness thus to serve, and no one is a finished scholar in his school who has not so learned to serve.

It is not self-interest nor self-assertion, as commonly understood, but self-denial and self-sacrifice, as practised by Jesus, that Christians need to cultivate. To possess his spirit fully we must be prepared to serve at any expense of time or energy. That is to say, we should be willing to serve, as well as to suffer, and ready to suffer in order to serve. What we should be prepared to do in this respect is shown by John 17:19, where Jesus is reported as saying, "For their sakes I sanctify

myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth." The word sanctify has here the sense of devote or consecrate, and the meaning is that he consecrated himself to God, even unto death, that his disciples might be truly consecrated in the same way and to the same end. He made himself an offering to God that each of them might make a similar offering. As the Father sent him into the world to execute a certain mission, so he sent them into the world to carry into effect the purposes of that mission with his spirit of self-sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

The design of his example is similarly explained and signally emphasized by Paul in II. Corinthians 5: 14, 15. There he expresses the opinion that, as one died on behalf of all, then all should die with him to sin and selfishness; because he died on behalf of all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose on their behalf. The purpose of the apostle in this passage is to make the followers of Jesus feel that what he did for them they should, so far as possible, do for those about them. After much reflection, Paul had reached the conclusion that the practical object of Christ, both in life and in death, was to reveal that great truth, to exemplify its underlying principle, and to create in his disciples a willingness to serve at any cost whatever to themselves. And, if they possess his spirit, they will be impelled to

<sup>1</sup>The word for sanctify is here used as a sacrificial term.

service by the same high motives that actuated him.

In strictness, everything he said or did was a species of service. He served by his teaching and preaching, by his sorrow and suffering, by his sympathy and love; so that we may glory in every aspect of his mission as a means of reconciliation, and every aspect of it is intended to be an example and an inspiration to us. He is our perfect pattern in all things, and all that he did was done, partly to deliver men from sin, and partly to incite them to beneficent activity. He wished to imbue them with his spirit and inspire them with his life, that they might live properly and serve usefully, too. For this reason he desired that his disciples might be kept and sanctified, not for themselves alone, but for the important business on which he was sending them.

Thus fundamentally his whole mission was a matter of service for mankind. In a previous chapter it is described as one of manifestation and mediation, but it was as truly one of ministration, because it was one of beneficence and redemption. He led men to God no less by his life and character than by his active, evangelistic labour. Whether teaching or preaching, helping or healing, soothing or sympathizing, he was always seeking to get men right with God, with one another, and with themselves. Endued with the Holy Spirit and with



power, he "went about doing good." Acts 10:38 tells us. And, apart from what he did and said, his very presence among men was an unconscious force for good to them, and one that exerted a reconciling influence on them.

Having seen how atonement in service is illustrated by the example of Christ, let us look at the suggestiveness of apostolic teaching on the subject. In II. Corinthians 5:18-20, the very process of getting men right with God is described as a ministration or a ministry; and "the ministry of reconciliation," as Paul calls it, is said to have been given to "us." The primary reference here is to the apostle and his fellow-workers, to whom the teaching of Jesus was at first entrusted; but the ultimate reference is to Christian people of all classes, without regard to sex or race.

While God reconciles men to himself by his Spirit, he does it by employing human instruments, not simply inspired teachers and ordained ministers, but ordinary members of the Church of Christ. Each one of these, therefore, each man or woman who has entered his discipleship, should be a mediator of manifestation and a minister of reconciliation. All professing Christians are comprehended in the sweep of the apostle's statement, and all are under an obligation to co-operate in that work. Such is the scope of the ministry appointed by God to help him in reconciling the world unto himself.

It has often been asserted that angels might have been employed to show men the way of salvation, or that God might have saved them by some other agency; but such assertions are unwarranted by anything in the Scriptures. Whatever God might have done by any other agents, human agents are the ones that he has chosen for this work. His having given us this ministry indicates that it was a part of his gracious purpose, and what he purposes is always right. Only men and women can deal with men and women. Only beings such as we can rescue beings like ourselves. Only those who know what we know of him can impart the knowledge we possess to those who have it not. The perfect mediator between God and men was himself a man, and no other kind of peace-maker could have accomplished what he did.

The means we are to use is styled by the apostle "the word of reconciliation," which signifies a message of reconciliation. It corresponds to what is styled in Acts 20:32 "the word of his grace," or the message of divine love contained in the Gospel. It is a compendious expression, therefore, for the fundamental teaching of the evangelists, namely, that God is our Father, that we are his children, and that, if we err or stray from him in any way, we may get right with him by abandoning our sin and amending our life.

The course to be taken by us in this work is sug-

gested by the appeal contained in the following verse, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." The method presented here is exhortation and entreaty. That was the way the apostles took, and is the way men have to take who move about from place to place, publishing the message of divine love to assembled audiences. That is also the public or official way for preachers and evangelists. But that is only one of many ways of ministering reconciliation to our fellows. Several other ways are open to us, and some of them may be more effective than formal evangelism.

One of these ways is altruism, or disinterested benevolence. Jesus interpreted the divine will concerning human relationships in terms of benevolence. We are to prove our love to God by our love to one another. Such benevolence consists not simply in wishing men well, but in doing them good, so far as we can. It includes the notion of practical beneficence, for a benevolence that does not help when there is power to help is not Christian benevolence. The very essence of Christianity is unselfish love manifested in the form of useful service. All altruistic activity is beneficent, and all beneficent activity is redemptive in its tendency. It impresses those in trouble as something divine; and it is divine in its origin, because God inspires it. Unselfish action tends not only to relieve suffering

and alleviate pain, but also to reconcile people to the will of him who has permitted them. That which is particularly needed, therefore, is redemptive endeavour on the part of all who name the name of Christ. By serving men unselfishly we may benefit them spiritually as we could not by any other means.

Another of these ways is sympathy, or fellow-feeling. Practical sympathy is feeling with another, and not merely for him. While we may feel for those whom we cannot help, we should feel with those whom we can help by entering into their condition, and doing something to improve it. True sympathy may be rightly styled the master-power in human nature. By using this power wisely, we may not only imitate the example of him who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," but also impart moral and spiritual strength to those in mental or physical distress. A word of encouragement, a sign of appreciation, a look of pity may work wonders. That another should think of them, come to them, and feel with them affects the sinful and unfortunate more favourably, perhaps, than any other thing; for such fellow-feeling will often produce penitence when nothing else would succeed. Great as is the redemptive power of benevolence, the redemptive power of sympathy is greater still.

Yet another of these ways is example. Being

good is vital to being right with God, and being right with him is, as a rule, essential to getting others right with him. What we are is of vastly more importance than what we do, so far as spiritual influence is concerned; for it is much more what we are than what we do that influences people favourably or unfavourably. It is the life or character that tells most powerfully with others for their weal or their woe, since that acts all the time, whereas our deeds act only at intervals. To accomplish the greatest amount of good and exert the highest kind of influence, therefore, we must be consistently good ourselves, because example is more efficacious than precept or preaching, or than both combined. More can be done by our life and spirit than in any other way.

Service is thus a very practical means of getting men right with God; and we may serve them atoningly by our entreaty of them, our interest in them, our sympathy with them, and our example to them. Every one of the methods mentioned may help not only to call forth what is purest and best in human nature, but also to make reflective persons consider their relation to the Deity and dedicate themselves to him. There is something persuasive in earnest preaching; there is something impressive in disinterested benevolence; there is something consoling in spontaneous sympathy; there is something stimulating in Christian example; there is something

reconciling in every one of these ways of working for the welfare of the world. Each of them exerts its own peculiar influence, and their united influence cannot be told. It has power not simply to convince, but to convert; not simply to relieve, but to rescue; not simply to soften, but to subdue; not simply to strengthen, but to sanctify.

Judged by the standard of Jesus, the good alone are great; but his goodness was a positive, not a negative, virtue. While goodness consists rather in being than in doing, passive virtue is practically valueless. So far as helping others goes, it is valueless. At all events, it has very little value either to the person possessing it or to those about him. Hence the most useful thing in the service of humanity, the one without which all other things are comparatively vain, is the possession of a Christly spirit. All work for others should be performed with the spirit of Christ.

Bearing one another's burdens is a means of fulfilling his law of love, the apostle teaches; but we must have his spirit, if we would practise burden-bearing or sorrow-sharing with success. To serve others, therefore, as we should, we must have his singleness of purpose, his tenderness of feeling, in short, his enthusiasm of humanity; for it is not so much what we do as how we do it that moves men most and helps them best. Spirituality is indispensable to the performance of the highest kind

of work. More depends on serving others in a loving, forbearing, Christ-like manner than on anything else. With his spirit everything we do, like everything he did, may be atoning in its influence.

We are thus to be purveyors of spiritual life to those about us, and to all within our reach. We are to live and work, to give and help, to think and plan with the Christ-spirit, so that an increasing number may be spiritually benefited by us all the time; for all Christian workers will admit that nothing we can do for others is comparable to that which we may be to them, if we possess the proper spirit. To practise beneficence perfectly, however, we must share with others whatever good things we have, so that they may participate in our abundance—not in our temporalities merely, but in our purity and spirituality. While we may reconcile men to God by suffering for them and ministering to them, there is nothing like living them into fellowship with him.

The great subjective motive to service is religious love, but the great objective motive is human welfare. So far as possible, therefore, we should always act on an impulse to help others whenever the prompting comes; for all such promptings are of God, and no one can tell how far-reaching the result of his action may be. But, though it is always right to follow a noble impulse, it must not be fol-

lowed thoughtlessly or inconsiderately. On the contrary, it should be followed with wise judgment; for love has its laws, and should be governed by common sense. Unless we exercise judgment with each person, we may make people selfish by our efforts for them; and, instead of doing them good, may do them harm. The regulative principle for Christian service is that all men are to help one another, because each one needs some one else, and each one can do something for some one else. Thus the law of serving others is self-corrective, and it excludes selfishness in every form.

These remarks lead naturally to the importance of social service, the necessity for which is becoming more apparent every day, and the neglect of which has, in the opinion of the present writer, been a serious drawback to the progress of Christianity. This element is being increasingly emphasized, but much more stress should be laid upon it. Such service is needed not to make proselytes, but to make good citizens. There is a submerged class in all large cities and in most large towns. Those should be visited and evangelized. There are also persons in every large community who are practically lost to Christ, because of the inactivity of his avowed disciples and the inconsistency of his professed followers. Some of these are hostile to religion, and others are indifferent towards it, because they feel themselves neglected, if not wholly



overlooked. All these should be sought and Christianized.

Many thoughtful persons have come to see that the true function of the Church is ministry. Hitherto it has been an institution for propagating doctrines; it should be made an institution for propagating endeavours. Excellent as sound doctrine is, and it has great intrinsic value, it is not more excellent than earnest endeavour. Among reflective Christians to-day there is a growing conviction that we need a new religious propagandism, a propagandism for spiritual activity; for ecclesiastical machinery is preventing hand-work and paralyzing personal effort. Organization is necessary, of course, but ministration is much more necessary. One ought to say, perhaps, it is organization for ministration that we need, because ministration is the thing of prime importance. The grand desideratum is more general association for helpful service to humanity.

When the nature of the requirements is properly understood and the value of ministration adequately appreciated, good men and women will devote more time to beneficent activity, for their indifference to social obligations and their neglect of social duties are greatly to be regretted. Beneficent spiritual activity is here meant, because we may be socially active, but spiritually inert. There has been altogether too much individualism in the past,

and too much stress has been laid upon the cultivation of the individual. Such culture is very important, but conquest is of greater importance; and it is culture by conquest that is required.

Heretofore religious people have thought more of their personal welfare than of the well-being of the community, and have sought their own salvation rather than that of those about them. In some denominations this has been particularly the case. Professing Christians should be made to feel that they are saved to serve and that service for others is the supreme test, not only of greatness, but also of discipleship. Those who think simply of their own safety are selfish and self-centred, and a selfish spirit is contrary to the mind of Christ. To be like Jesus we must die to self, as well as sin, and live to God by leading others to him. Activity of that sort is a condition of true discipleship.

To remedy the existing state of things the Church must be reorganized. Too long and too exclusively she has been organized for worship; the time has come when she should be organized for work. If ministry be her rightful function, and, according to our Lord, it is, then the sooner she is organized for work, the better both for her and for the world. The sole object of the Gospel is the uplifting of mankind by bringing them into fellowship with God. To get and keep men right with him is what

is needed. Epitomizing Micah 6:8, Matthew 23:23 sums up the divine requirements in the three great moral duties—justice, mercy, faith. These are the only things that God requires, and to make them universal is all that he desires. The work of making them universal is assigned to us; and such work, properly performed, is worship.

In his recent novel, "A Prophet in Babylon," Dr. W. J. Dawson proposes a League of Service composed of workers outside the churches, who will be united by the love of humanity in the common service of humanity. The motto suggested for this league is "A fellowship of all who love in the service of all who suffer." But, much as such a league might accomplish, the Church, which is already organized for fellowship, needs only to be organized for work to become able, in due time, to evangelize the world. Once organized on that basis, she should be broad enough to include in her membership all who are willing to help with a Christ-like spirit in the uplifting of mankind, and should be strong enough to draw to her assistance every humanitarian society, such as the one proposed.

Instead of "A fellowship of all who love in the service of all who suffer," a better motto for the Church would be, "The co-operation of all who love in the service of all who live"; for we all need one another in some sense, and we can all

serve one another in some way. The obligation to serve is universal. Every one can do something and every one should do something. The Christianity of Jesus is co-operative. The joint action of men with one another and with God is what he advocated. Discipleship for him means brotherhood between man and man, and brotherhood between man and man means mutual helpfulness. That is its fundamental idea. Besides, we are so constituted that we need one another. No person can attain a high degree of excellence, much less become all that he might be, by himself. "The individual cannot be perfect apart from his kind," some one has pertinently said. He will inevitably have an imperfect character who attempts to live alone. Hence the union of all for the welfare of all is the practical interpretation of the Christ-ideal.

Of late years the opinion has often been expressed that the Church of the future will be the Church of the Good Samaritan and the Golden Rule, and there seems every reason to believe that it will. Nor can such a readjustment be too speedily brought about. When that takes place, the standard of enrolment will be a desire to be useful and a willingness to work. Then the Church will be pervaded by a spirit of helpfulness and dominated by the rule of love; for self-sacrificing love is a master-principle, containing in itself a law which embraces all beings and comprehends all

duties. As unselfish action regulated by the rule of love is the supreme test of discipleship for Christ, it should be a suitable qualification for membership in his Church.

Christianity is essentially a social religion. Its fundamental doctrines are those of divine fatherhood and human brotherhood. It is founded on the conception of a family, and the filial relationship is that which Jesus emphasizes in the Sermon on the Mount. His view of the divine kingdom is that of a great household in which God rules as a benignant Father over all who are devoted to his will. Such a household implies on the part of its members conscious fellowship with God and mutual helpfulness among themselves. Hence, if Christianity is to fulfil its heaven-appointed mission; nay, if it is measurably to realize the divine ideal, the Church must pay more attention to social conditions and give more prominence to social work. Each Christian should be trained to render helpful service with a loving spirit.

Since atonement in service is ministrative, and since ministration is so momentous a means of reconciliation, we should scarcely require to be exhorted to perform social work. Others have a claim on a portion of our time and thought, at least; and the knowledge that they need us, and that we may benefit them by our efforts for them, should be a sufficient incentive. Then we have for our

encouragement the assurance that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way, becomes the instrument of saving a soul from death and of covering a multitude of sins. Nevertheless, there are several other considerations that may be briefly described.

The first consideration for the Christian is the example of Christ, which has been mentioned several times, though in a different connection each time. His life of service was designed to be a pattern for each of us, and we are to imitate him in unselfish acting, no less than in uncomplaining suffering; for he intends each disciple to lead a life of beneficent and redemptive activity. His love within us should constrain us to active effort, as it constrained the apostle Paul, and as it has constrained all since his day who have been successful in turning men from sin. Love that is unready to suffer, or unwilling to serve in the interest of humanity, is unworthy of the name of Christian.

A second consideration is the example of God. He is the self-giving soul of the universe, and is always giving himself to his creatures. As he serves us, we should serve others; and, as he is never weary of blessing us, we should never tire of benefiting them. To serve others, therefore, is not merely to be like Christ, but to be like God himself. It is Godlike to love the unlovely and help the unworthy; and anything that gives men a truer con-

ception of his character, or a better understanding of his requirements, is essentially atoning in its influence.

A third consideration is the example of nature. Everything in creation was made to serve; nothing exists that was not meant to do something. The roots of a tree serve the trunk; the trunk serves the branches; the branches serve the twigs and stems; the twigs and stems serve the leaves and blossoms; the leaves and blossoms serve the other parts of the organism, and all work together to serve something else. Moreover, the sun, the moon, the stars, and other created objects are all intended to serve, and are all serving in some way.

A fourth consideration is the obligation to serve. Since ministering is the real meaning of existence, ministrations is the true purpose of life. Being made for service, we owe it to ourselves, as well as our Maker, to do what we can for the world. Unless our life represent some benefit to others, we are not living as we should. We need a deeper appreciation and a fuller acceptance of the duty which nature imposes on us with a view to the continuity and elevation of the race. The solidarity of mankind necessitates service rather than suffering, because, while a partial measure of the latter is inevitable, a complete measure of the former is imperative. We may be required to suffer, but we are morally bound to

serve. To object to serve, therefore, or to neglect to serve is to disregard both the primary duty and the principal end of life.

Then the fifth consideration is the joy of service. There is a delight in self-denying effort, and those who live only for themselves lose all that is richest and sweetest in Christian experience. It is not the egoistic, but the altruistic, life that gives gladness and satisfaction. Noble deeds unselfishly performed, these are the things that make life a joyous and blessed possession. We should think of the privilege of serving, therefore, not of the expensiveness of it; for they know nothing of the joy of service who think anything of the cost of sacrifice. The practice of self-denial for the sake of others brings a benediction with it; and the enjoyment is intensified when we are instrumental in turning men from sin and leading them to God.

But the great practical considerations are that others need our assistance and that we need the discipline which assisting them affords. The latter as well as the former motive must be taken into account. For, besides the fact that we are obligated by the bond of brotherhood to render helpful service, we should remember that the end of existence is not self-interest, but self-realization, and that self-realization is possible only through association and co-operation. It depends in part on intercourse with others, and in part on ministering to



them. We are here to develop ourselves by leading useful lives, and we cannot develop ourselves perfectly without a certain amount of self-denying effort. The self-realization of those who love, however, includes the realization of those who are loved.

To think of the advantage to ourselves of self-denying effort may not seem altruistic; but, if self-interest be subordinated to benevolence, we are justified in considering it. While we should work for others without direct regard for self, not allowing personal advantage to influence us unduly, the motive of self-realization is a legitimate one. God intends unselfish action to be a benefit to those who serve, as well as those who are served. Therefore, thought of our own welfare is not inconsistent with a self-renouncing spirit; and, if our efforts are earnestly directed to the serving of society and the saving of men, there will be no danger of selfishness.

Those who are fully consecrated to the cause of Christ, however, will need no consideration other than that of doing good. Such persons will think rather of results than of rewards, and will serve primarily for the sake of being useful. The beneficial effect of their efforts will be a sufficient stimulus in itself. And, while the discipline may be as important to them as the activity is profitable for others, they will feel that the well-being of society requires

their service and, therefore, it is their duty to do all they can.

But, whatever worthy motive may sway us most powerfully, it is Scriptural to remember that the losing of our life is the only way to find it. That is the universal law for moral beings, and nothing can be more gratifying than to have our life reproduced in the lives of others. To give is to live, and to live a complete life we must give ourselves in loving devotion to the divine will for the benefit of humanity. It is a great thing to increase the stock of good-will among men, but a vastly greater thing to get them right with God at the same time.

## IX

### ATONEMENT IN THEORY

**H**AVING considered all the Biblical elements, we have still to deal with the leading theories that have been constructed during the past seventeen hundred years. Each element has been seen to have a significance of its own; and each aspect of the work of Christ—his life, his teaching, his death, his suffering—has been shown to be of very great account.

Though men have been accustomed to speak of it as a profound mystery, and encouraged to think of it as something that cannot be fully explained, the Scriptures teach that atonement is as natural as forgiveness, and as easy to understand. On the Godward side, indeed, it is forgiveness, being the act of God in figuratively covering or cancelling sin when we comply with the requisite conditions. This he is said to do by freeing us from its guilt and condemnation, but not from its effects, except as they may be overcome by the power of divine grace.

Hence, when people obtain the Biblical view of the subject, they will cease to regard it as a peculiar

one, or one peculiarly difficult to explain. Being a personal matter between man and his Maker, it is a moral, not a mysterious, transaction; and, on the manward side, it is a conscious process, which produces a subjective state. By the Biblical writers the doctrine is expressed in terms of experience. It needs only to be experienced, therefore, to be understood; for, on our part, atonement is simply putting ourselves and keeping ourselves in tune with the Infinite.

Failing to perceive that it is expressed in terms of experience, men have theorized and philosophized over it, till they have obscured the doctrine and confused the minds of myriads of persons with respect to it. By their fanciful speculations they have prejudiced thoughtful men and woman against a vital Christian truth, so that not a few of them are repelled by the very mention of the word atonement.

In their fondness for theory they have distorted the meaning of the Scriptures and misled those who have studied them, for it is very manifest that the Bible does not teach what so many theologians have claimed. We need not be concerned about the character of God, because that requires no vindication, but we should be concerned about the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, the practical character of which should keep us from misunderstanding it.

Unfortunately, too, such men have led many to

suppose that they were not in harmony with evangelical doctrines, when the theories they were asked to believe were not in harmony with evangelical conceptions. That result has come from not distinguishing between the fact and the philosophy of atonement, or rather from not observing the difference between atonement as a fact and a formal explanation of it. One may readily accept the fact, but reject the theory, because the one is a matter of Scripture, and the other a matter of theology.

Respecting every doctrine, people should be taught to distinguish between the facts of the Bible and the theories that have been formed to explain them, because a fact is one thing, but a theory is another and a different thing. It is historic facts, not philosophic theories, that demand consideration or deserve credence; and the facts pertaining to each vital doctrine may be tested by experience. The following sentence from a recognized authority is worth pondering, as well as reproducing: "The great heresies have, in almost every instance, been theories, which either contradicted revealed facts or were so defective in their recognition of the facts as to fail to give them their proper value or their full extent of truth." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted from a communication to the present writer from the Rev. Chancellor Burwash, S.T.D., LL.D., and printed in a pamphlet entitled "A Supplementary Statement."

Since the latter part of the second century, so many theories have been advanced that most Christians have become sadly perplexed in regard to the doctrine. At all events, for a considerable period very many have not known either how to view it or what to think about it. Only the principal ones, however, need to be examined. The purpose of this examination is to show approximately when each one arose, to state concisely what its practical object was, and to indicate briefly what it was supposed to contribute towards an understanding of the subject.

Some of the theories are unreasonable, others of them are unethical, and all of them are more or less unscriptural. Moreover, a few of them are so mechanical and irrational as to be a fruitful cause of scepticism, and have driven some who are repelled by them into positive disbelief. Each theory expresses the thought of the time when it was made, or the way in which the doctrine was viewed by a leading thinker of that day. Each theory, too, contains a measure of truth; but there is a very small amount in some of them, and one has to look quite closely to find what little there is.

Ere we glance at the various phases through which the thought of the Church has passed since the days of the apostles, it is worth mentioning that the earliest Christian literature on the subject con-

tains only general statements concerning reconciliation to God through Christ, and that those statements consist principally in reproducing the language of the New Testament. For a good while subsequent to the apostolic age, there was no attempt at constructing any formal theory of atonement. During the first century of her history, at least, the teaching of the Church respecting it was simple and practical, and it was not made a subject either of philosophical speculation or of controversial discussion.

Those who immediately succeeded the apostles viewed atonement rather as a fact than as a doctrine. With them, as with the disciples, the experimental interest was supreme. With the disciples, also, they viewed the life and death of Jesus as the fulfilment of prophecy, but did not arbitrarily detach the death from the life. They regarded his death, not as an isolated act, but as the natural consummation of a life of self-devotion to the will of the Father for the sake of the world. Had the later theologians been as wise as were the earlier ones, the results would have been very different, and the Church would have been spared a vast amount of controversy.

Speaking generically, one might say that there are only three great theories by which theologians have attempted to explain the facts of Scripture. These are the Sacrificial, the Governmental, and

the Moral theory. Though there are many others, they may all be grouped or classified under some one or other of those three. But, while they are the leading or generic ones, there are three more almost equally well known. So altogether there are six theories to be examined, namely, the Sacrificial, the Satisfactional, the Substitutional, the Commercial, the Governmental, and the Moral.

The first formal explanation is the sacrificial theory. Dwelling on the figurative language applied to Christ in the Scriptures, and taking such terms as "ransom" and "propitiation" literally, the post-apostolic Fathers were led to conceive of him as having purchased our redemption by the offering of himself for our sin. For a long while men disputed whether the ransom price was paid to Satan or to God. But, as God could not both give and receive at the same time, it was generally supposed to be paid to Satan to induce him to release man from his power. This explanation was accepted by such writers as Irenæus in the second century and Origen in the third and Augustine in the fifth, though by each of them in a somewhat different way.

Irenæus speaks of the death of Christ as a ransom and a sacrifice, but does not maintain that the ransom offered was paid to Satan. He holds that, by yielding to the Adversary, man fell under his sway, but is freed from his dominion through



union with the great mediator, Jesus Christ. Regarding him as the representative of the race, he views him as entering into man's place, and as accomplishing all that was necessary to propitiate God and redeem man from the Tempter, thus making the work of Christ, especially his obedience, the ground of human acceptance. In this view, men are redeemed or saved in virtue of what Jesus did.

Like Irenæus, Origen taught that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice to God, and thereby rendered him propitious; but he regarded his obedience as a relative, not an indispensable, necessity in gaining for man the victory over his Enemy. According to him, however, Jesus was a literal ransom paid to the Evil One to liberate men from his control. He argued that Satan had legitimate authority to keep mankind in thralldom, but that his lawful control was forfeited by the surrender to him of Christ, who could not long be holden of him, by reason of his sinlessness. To account for the Tempter's acceptance of so insecure a ransom, Origen conceived the preposterous notion that Satan, being ignorant of the character of Jesus, was misled into believing that, if he were once given to him, he would remain permanently under his sway. Thus, by a species of deception supposed to be practised on him by the Deity, Satan was led to relinquish his dominion over men.

On the subject of atonement Augustine employs the prevalent conception of a redemption from Satanic power, but in a rather vaguer form than that of Origen. He regards men as liberated from the dominion of the Adversary by means of the sacrifice of Christ, whom he seems to view as a ransom paid to Satan, though some interpret his language to mean that the ransom was merely exhibited, and not offered, to him. At best, however, his view is only a modified Origenism.

Absurd and unbiblical as it is, this theory was an attempt to explain the sacrificial phraseology used of Christ in the New Testament, but those who constructed, as well as those who accepted, it overlooked the metaphorical character of the terms employed, and interpreted them according to heathen, not according to Hebrew, usage. In one form or another this belief was current in the Church for about a thousand years. In one form or another, too, myriads of people believe still that men belong at birth to Satan, and must be rescued from his power, instead of believing with the evangelists that they belong naturally to God, and need only to become his subjects by a voluntary act.

Jesus was a ransom in a figurative, but not in a literal, sense of the term. He was also a sacrifice in the sense of a voluntary self-offering, as Ephesians 5:2 teaches, for the author states dis-

tinctly that he gave himself to God on our behalf.<sup>1</sup> So his offering was something done for us rather than something given to him, though anything given to him or a sacred purpose may be Biblically called a sacrifice. When people tell us, therefore, that we get to God only through an offering, the statement is quite true, if we understand by it a self-offering. That which he wants of each of us is the heart, and that is the only thing which any one can give. As all the fitness he requires is to feel our need of him, to adapt the language of a well-known stanza, so, to continue in a similar strain, all the offering he desires is to give ourselves to him.

The second formal explanation, and it was really the first systematic one, is the satisfactoral theory. This was propounded in the eleventh century by Anselm of Canterbury, who modified the sacrificial theory by maintaining that the ransom given by Christ was paid not to Satan, but to God. Athanasius had suggested a similar idea in the fourth century, but Anselm was the first to present the view consistently. He conceived of sin as nothing but not rendering to God his due. Not to render him his due honour is to withdraw from him what

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word for offering in this verse signifies an oblation, or a bloodless sacrifice, and the term is used in Romans 15: 16 of the Gentiles saved by the preaching of the Gospel, who are there regarded as a gift presented to God.

is his, and that is to commit sin. This sin must be followed either by satisfaction or by punishment; for, if God were to pronounce pardon without reparation, it would violate his glory. Thus arises the necessity of satisfaction as a condition of forgiveness.

But, since his rights must be restored and his honour repaired, and since unaided man was incompetent to do either, he himself had to do both, or procure some one not inferior to himself who should be competent to make the necessary satisfaction. In other words, should he determine to release the sinner, he must provide the means. This he did by incarnating himself in a unique being, designated the God-man, who not only compensated for human guilt, but also fulfilled the divine claims.

Anselm regarded the guilt which man had contracted as infinite because he had sinned against an infinite Being, and argued that the enormity of his sin required an infinite satisfaction. For this reason he taught that with infinite compassion God became man in order to enable humanity, in the person of his Son, to satisfy him for its sins. Only a divine person such as Christ could render the requisite satisfaction, because God only could satisfy himself. Such is the Anselmic doctrine of vicarious satisfaction; and, strange as it may seem, this theory has not merely obtained a very wide accep-

ance, but is still considered evangelical by a large section of the Christian Church.

There are some elements of truth in this theory, or so acute an intellect as that of Anselm would not have constructed it; but, though an improvement on the previous explanations, it is quite unbiblical. It proceeds on the analogy of civil law, and views the satisfaction required of God as a debt. To say that God rather than Satan must be satisfied is correct, but God does not need to be satisfied in any civil or legal sense. If he is our Father, we must proceed not on the analogy of civil law, but on that of paternal love. A true father is satisfied when his child repents and returns to him, and the Scriptures teach that God is satisfied when men repent and comply with the conditions of forgiveness.

Then, while withdrawing from him what is his is to commit sin, that is only the negative aspect of sin. In its positive aspect sin is the conscious transgression of known law, so that it does not consist simply in not rendering to him his due. Though sin is fundamentally against God, in that it is a violation of his law, it does not affect his honour, much less injure it. On the contrary, it is practically against those who commit it, and it injures morally only those who do wrong consciously. But, whether sin be conscious or unconscious, God is satisfied when we abandon it and accept Christ.

Each person, however, must put away his own sin by the aid of the Divine Spirit.

In this theory the death of Christ is viewed as a satisfaction to the divine honour for human transgression. Such a price was considered necessary to make the forgiveness of man possible and right. But, apart from its unscripturalness, the notion is unreasonable; for nothing any one might do for a sinner could make it possible for God to forgive him till he complies with the terms of forgiveness, and when he does that, it is right that he should be pardoned. Besides, if the divine honour had been violated, no one but the person who had injured it could make reparation, for moral injuries can be repaired only by those responsible for them.

The third formal explanation may be called the substitutional theory. The Reformers modified Anselm's theory by introducing the analogies of criminal law. In their view the satisfaction required of God consists in punishment. They held that men were under obligation to bear the punishment which sin deserved, but that Jesus took their place for the purpose of expiating sin, and endured the punishment of it in their stead. For instance, Robert South preached that "Christ substituted his own body in our room, to receive the whole stroke of that dreadful retribution inflicted by the hand of an angry omnipotence"; and John Calvin

wrote that "Christ took upon himself and suffered the punishment which, by the righteous judgment of God, impended over all sinners, and by this expiation the Father has been satisfied and his wrath appeased."<sup>1</sup> According to this theory Christ became a literal substitute for sinners, who, but for his interposition, would have been consigned to endless perdition.

This theory, also, contains a measure of truth, though the amount in it is very small. The idea of substitution is a Scriptural one, but not in reference to anything that Jesus did. In Genesis 22:13 Abraham is said to have taken a ram and to have sacrificed him "in the stead of his son"; but the Biblical writers knew that, while substitution is possible in material things, it is impossible in moral matters. One may suffer and die in the stead of another physically, but one can neither suffer nor die in the place of another morally, because neither sin nor guilt nor moral penalty can be transferred. Sin must be expiated, of course, but every man must expiate his own offence, so far as its moral aspect is concerned. There is no such thing as substitutionary moral suffering or substitutionary moral punishment, and the New Testament does not suggest that Christ was a vicarious punishment. It simply represents our Lord as, in loving obedience to the will of the Father, effecting the reconciliation

<sup>1</sup>"Institutes," Bk. II., chapter 16, pars. 3, 4.

of man to God. Only the consequences of our sin could touch his righteous soul.

Notwithstanding its unscripturalness, very many continue to teach that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. But to suggest that anything must be done to satisfy divine justice in order that divine love may operate, is to array one attribute of God against another. His love is as much from everlasting as his justice is. Hence to assume that something was needed to satisfy his justice is to assume that something was antecedent to his love, which is utterly inconceivable. Since he is a perfect Being, his love and his justice are the same thing, because they are both dispensed with absolute righteousness. Everything the Deity does is the manifestation or expression of benevolence; and, as redemption is the outcome of benevolence, the attribute of mercy, which prompts him to pardon, must precede atonement.

A fourth formal explanation may be called the commercial theory. The foregoing theories are all commercial in a sense, because they all regard atonement as the payment of a debt; but among later writers the payment is expressed in a much grosser form. Some of them, for example, maintain that in order to afford a perfect satisfaction, Christ experienced the wrath of God, the curse of the law, and the pangs of hell; and one of them, Quenstedt, declares that "Christ was substituted



in the place of the debtors " and that " in his satisfaction he sustained all that the rigour of God's justice demanded, so much so that he felt even the very pains of hell, although not in hell or eternally." <sup>1</sup> Such hymns as " Jesus paid it all, all the debt I owe," and " Free from the law, O happy condition," will illustrate the commercial aspects of this theory.

There is nothing whatever to be said in favour of such a view. It is unscriptural and repellent. It is unethical, also, because it makes the sacrifice that Jesus offered a mere commercial transaction, or a mere mercantile negotiation. If Christ did all that the Father required, there is no room for forgiveness. A debtor may fairly demand release when his debt is paid. If Christ has paid man's debt, then man has nothing to do but believe that his obligation has been cancelled. Such teaching leads to antinomianism, or the doctrine that faith frees the Christian from the claims of the moral law. But is Jesus not called a surety in the Scriptures? Yes; in Hebrews 7: 22 he is so designated, but the passage has no reference to atonement. He is there styled a surety, not as being a substitute to take our place, nor yet as being a bondsman to pay our debt, but as being the pledge of a superior covenant. The sole object of the author is to show the superiority of the Christian dispensation. Physical and

<sup>1</sup> *Theologia Didactico-polemica*, I., 39.

financial liabilities may be assumed by one person for another, but moral liabilities cannot be. No one can pay a moral debt, or meet a moral obligation, but the party that incurs it. In morals each man must meet his own obligation and pay his own debt. The mortgage which our past sins have upon us can be lifted only by ourselves.

A fifth form of explanation is known as the governmental theory, and was constructed in the seventeenth century by Grotius, a great Dutch jurist. As the theories just examined seemed to leave no room for forgiveness, he maintained that Christ was not actually punished for the sins of men, but merely endured suffering which God, as a merciful ruler, could accept in the place of punishment. Instead of regarding his death as necessary to satisfy divine justice, he regards the satisfaction afforded by it as a free and gracious arrangement, adapted to display the righteousness of God and vindicate the dignity of his administration. In this view the voluntary sufferings of Christ were designed to meet the demands of justice as a sort of punitive example, and impress men with such respect for law and authority as to render forgiveness safe. On the exercise of faith in what Jesus suffered, they are delivered from punishment by divine grace.

This theory eliminates the notion of penal substitution, or vicarious satisfaction; but, though with certain modifications it has been widely accepted,

it is just as unscriptural as each of the others. With a singular conception of Deity, it supposes the claims of divine justice to be so relaxed that, on condition of our faith, the sufferings of Christ become a quasi-substitute for penalty, and God, as an act of equity, accepts his death in the place of ours. By so exhibiting his clemency and his hatred of sin, he shows us the seriousness of disobedience and presents us with a powerful motive to deter us from it. Thus the theory of Grotius regards God as a regent rather than a parent, and man as a culprit rather than a child. Moreover, it makes the passion of Christ a prudential expedient for the maintenance of a righteous order, because it views his death more as a measure of government than as a manifestation of love. A true father does not ask if it is safe to forgive his child, nor does he desire anything to meet the demands of his law. Those demands are met when the conditions of forgiveness are fulfilled.

A sixth form of explanation may be styled the moral theory. From the time of Abelard, in the twelfth century, there has been a tendency to protest against the crudities of the ancient systems of doctrine. That scholastic theologian viewed the passion of Christ as a demonstration of love, which awakens such a response in us as to liberate us from the bondage of sin and deliver us into the favour of God. His view led gradually to the construction

of the theory of Moral Influence. According to this theory the death of Christ was not intended to remove obstacles to forgiveness on the side of God, because on his side there were no obstacles to be removed, but was designed to have an atoning effect in bringing sinners to repentance and in turning them to righteousness. His work consists in influencing men to lead better lives, or, as Bushnell, its greatest representative on this continent, has said, "Christ is shown to be a Saviour, not as being a ground of justification, but as being the moral power of God upon us, (and) so a power of salvation."<sup>1</sup>

Resting, as it does, on the vicariousness of love, this view is Scriptural, so far as it goes; but it falls much below that of the New Testament. There is a mighty moral power in the death of Christ. Romans 5: 10 regards his death as exerting an atoning influence on men; but his death was only a part of his work, and it forms only one element in atonement. And the author of that epistle asserts that, while sinners are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, they are saved from sin and condemnation by his life, that is, by virtue of his life in them. In agreement with this assertion, I. John 5: 20 says, "This is the true God and eternal life," which means that God, as manifested and known through Jesus Christ, is eternal life. It is as the mediator of eternal life that Christ is viewed by the apostles;

<sup>1</sup>"The Vicarious Sacrifice," p. 449.

and, because this theory represents his work simply as a display of divine love in order to induce men to repent, it is deficient in that respect. Atonement is owing to a right moral relationship, and not to anything mechanical, nor yet to a mere moral influence.

It is only fair to add, however, that the moral theory is found in many different forms, and that its later advocates do not confine the influence of Jesus chiefly to his death. Neither do they attach any particular importance to it, apart from his life, because they consider the life and the death a unity. Their fundamental principle is to interpret the work of Christ in terms of right personal relations with God. The aim of his mission, they hold, was not to pay a debt nor be a substitute, not to satisfy a claim nor secure an indemnity, but to keep men from sinning and save them from condemnation through a proper spiritual attitude towards God.

In some of its better forms, this theory approaches closely to the view of the apostles; but no view of atonement is wholly Scriptural which stops short of teaching that men are reconciled to God through their oneness with him in Christ as the mediator of eternal life. As was stated elsewhere in other words, reconciliation is not merely a change effected in the disposition of man towards God, but a change in man's relation to him. It is a change produced by the Divine Spirit from a wrong to a right rela-

tion; that is, from rebellion to allegiance, from enmity to friendship, from separation to union, from alienation to love.

Such is the nature and such are the fallacies of atonement in theory. It has been suggested that each leading theory had some relation to the social ideas dominant at the time of its construction. We may, if we will, suppose that the Ransom theory was agreeable to modes of thought prevailing in an age of brigandage, that the Satisfaction theory had strong support in mediæval notions of authority, that the Government theory may be traced to the prominence given in the days of Grotius to international law, and that the Moral Influence theory was prompted by more humanitarian conceptions. The suggestion has very little value, however, though there is probably some ground for it. At all events, the ancient theories have been materially modified in recent years by a gradual emphasizing of the human factor in the process of redemption; and men are coming more and more to see that, according to New Testament teaching, it is only as we accept Christ by uniting ourselves to him that his work has any saving efficacy for us.

The explanation given of the various terms that are used of Christ in the New Testament should enable the reader to appreciate their proper force wherever they occur. Those who did not understand their Scriptural import have sometimes been repelled

by them, especially as some hymn-writers have employed them; but, when due allowance is made for their figurative character, they have each a practical significance. As applied to Jesus, the word "ransom" represents his service for us; the word "cross," his love to us and for us; the word "blood," his love to us and his life in us. Each term expresses his spirit towards us, and the spirit we should have towards one another.

Before this chapter is concluded, it seems expedient to repeat that atonement in itself is both objective and subjective—objective in God and subjective in man; that atonement in God is initiative, atonement in Christ mediative, atonement in man experimentative, atonement in sacrifice figurative, atonement in death consecrative, atonement in suffering participative, atonement in service ministrative, and atonement in theory speculative.

In the judgment of the present writer, all theorizing about the doctrine should be discouraged, if not condemned; for most theories either put God outside the process of atonement or bring him into it mechanically, whereas he originated it and was always connected with it. He is the beginning, the middle, and the end of the whole work, because in reality his love is our atonement.

A theory is merely a lame attempt to set forth in a speculative form what is plainly and practically expressed in the Scriptures. Had the teaching of

the prophets and apostles been regarded and appreciated, no unscriptural theory would ever have been constructed to rest like an incubus on the minds of modern men. We do not need a theory to put ourselves right with our heavenly Father any more than we need one to put ourselves right with our fellow-men.

Getting right with God is a matter, not of theory, but of fact. It is something gained by effort and proved by experience. That is the way in which the New Testament writers present the doctrine. And, though their presentation may be called a view, it cannot fairly be called a theory, because it involves neither inference nor conjecture, but is verifiable by practice. In a true sense, therefore, one may say that all theories of atonement are inadequate to explain what it means.

Atonement is walking in light and working in love with our Maker; it is dealing with equity and dwelling in peace with mankind. So it is concerned with life, and is intended for life. As viewed by the apostles, it is a life—a divinely quickened life, or a life quickened into spiritual activity by the influence of the Holy Spirit on the human heart. Till that experience is gained, no theory, or combination of theories, will make clear what it is; and, with that experience, all thought of theorizing over the doctrine will cease.



