

ATONEMENT:

AND

The Christian's Relation to Sin.

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Atonement.

UNFALLEN and in a condition of innocence the "first man" as formed of God knew no sin. Through sin he acquired a conscience and the sense of guilt. As a fallen being he knew sin.

In the absolute holiness of His nature and person the Lord Jesus knew no sin. Not a shadow of personal guilt for one moment ever rested upon Him. His holy soul instantly repelled all temptation to evil, though such temptation came to Him only from without. In Him—in His blessed, perfect and spotless person there was no sin. He knew no sin, therefore, as His own. Yet He was made sin as bearing in His holy body on the cross its dire and awful punishment. When He took the guilty sinner's place in judgment, He bore to the uttermost the wrath (or vengeance) of God against sin. He bore the wrath in bearing the punishment, the effect of God's wrath against sin.

The wrath, *i.e.*, the judgment, of God "upon all impiety and unrighteousness of men" is revealed from heaven, and confirmed as nowhere else, in the sufferings and death of Christ as the sinless victim and substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. The holy sin-bearer was made sin as a substitute, as having taken the place of the sinner to bear in His own person the full penalty of sin. He became the sinner's substitute. In His cross-sufferings and death for sin He was made sin. Yet He knew no sin as fallen man knows it in the consciousness of personal guilt. But God made Him to be sin for us, *i.e.*, as our substitute.

Sin was never in Christ. Nor was He made sin in any other than a substitutionary sense "for us" (2 Cor. v. 21). In Himself—in His own blessed and adorable person He was infinitely holy, and "without spot," even when made sin for us. Nor do we in ourselves become the righteousness of God, in any conceivable sense, save as we are now

seen "in Him," in Christ. For a brief moment He was made sin, that we might become displays of God's righteousness in Him for ever.

Sin is infinitely abhorrent to God. Adequate Atonement for sin is not measured only by the character and extent of man's failure, but by that which is due to the majesty and holiness of God. We cannot therefore measure the Atonement Christ made for sin by "the sin of the world," *i.e.*, the sin of the whole human race. For whatever the extent or limit of human guilt, the offended majesty of God's throne determines the nature, character, and extent of the Atonement required by Him, and in all this He alone is able to judge, He alone must decide what is due to Himself.

In the punishment of *sin* is comprehended the punishment of *sins*. Hence, it is an error of the first magnitude to separate the bearing (or penalty) of sins from the bearing (or penalty) of sin. The confession of the repentant remnant in the day to come (Is. liii. 5,6), and that of believers now (1 Pet. ii. 24), shew that to faith it is given to own that Christ's blood cleanses from every sin. Christ "suffered for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous," *i.e.*, for the sinner (iii. 18). Did He, then, suffer also for sin superadded to sins? Is not the penalty of sins the same also as the penalty of sin, not another, nor united, but one penalty? We must bear in mind that Scripture often uses the term *sin* in its widest possible sense, as inclusive of *sins* in their totality.

Doubtless much perplexity has resulted from confusing 2 Cor. v. 21 with Rom. viii. 3. In the former passage we have, perhaps, the most solemn and remarkable statement of the doctrine of the Atonement to be found in Scripture. In Rom. viii. 3 the subject before the mind of the inspired writer is not at all the Atonement, though he barely hints at it, but the condemnation of sin *in the flesh* consequent on Atonement—on God's dealing in judgment with sin *in the*

sacrifice of Christ. The judgment of our sins in the cross carried with it the condemnation of our sinful nature. It uttered the sentence of judgment on our condition in the flesh. Thus we walk not after the flesh. In regard to "our old man" we are crucified with Christ.

In the Gospel we learn that Christ has borne the judgment of sin according to God's estimate of its desert. On this sure ground the forgiveness of *sins* is preached to *all* in Christ's name. Christ's work of suffering and death in the bearing of sin has glorified God in the putting away of sin as an impassable barrier between the sinner and Himself. The cross-work of our Lord has perfectly glorified God in respect of sin. Christ has borne to the uttermost God's wrath against *sin*—which a sinner dying in his sins never can do—so that God is righteous in the remission of *sins*, and in bringing to Himself the sinner who bows to His grace in the Gospel. But the sinner who believes not, dies in his sins, and the wrath of God abides on him for ever (John iii. 36). For the virtue of Atonement is derived only from Christ's work of substitutionary suffering for sin, from His death, and from His blood, by which propitiation is made before God in the holiest, and sin is put away.

There is virtue in the blood of Jesus to cover "the sin of the world" (John i. 29), and thus He is the propitiation "for the whole world" (1 John ii. 2). By His sacrifice for sin He met and satisfied every claim of God's throne. In His death for sin the Son of man was glorified as He never had been before, and as He never can be again. For by His mighty work in the putting away of sin God has been glorified (John xiii. 31). Every excellence in the character of God, every attribute of His being has been glorified. All that God is in Himself, and all that He can be to His people, and to every sinner in the world, has been magnified and glorified by the death of Christ.

In Christ's suffering for sin, in God's forsaking of Him when He was made sin, we see the character and hatefulness of sin in God's sight. We learn also something of the bitterness of the cup which was given Him to drink as we remember how in anticipation of drinking that cup His soul was "very sorrowful even unto death" (Matt. xxvi. 28), He was "amazed and oppressed in spirit" (Mark xiv. 33), and "being in conflict He prayed more intently. And His sweat became as great drops of blood falling down upon the earth" (Luke xxii. 44). He prayed that the cup might be removed from Him (ver. 42). Yet He who knew perfectly the full extent and severity of the divine judgment—He who knew God's wrath against sin took that cup of inexpressible bitterness from His Father's hand, and drank it to put away sin—to glorify God, and open a channel for the outflow of His infinite love to a perishing world. All sin is rebellion against God, for "sin is lawlessness" (1 John iii. 4). It is doing our own will. All that springs from man's fallen nature is sin, and that nature is "sin in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3). It was acquired by one act of sin, by listening to the tempter. If a sinner now says, "I have not fallen from innocence to guilt," he shews that he thinks himself more trustworthy than the "first man" in innocency. But man has been fully tried in every way, and has failed. Yet as a sinner he is responsible for the *rejection* of grace, and he who dies without the knowledge of grace will be judged according to his works.

Unnumbered millions have perished for whom Christ died. Yet His death for the world has not been in vain (John vi. 51), for countless hosts have proved its sufficiency as the firm foundation on which their souls could rest for eternity.

The sins of the whole race of mankind, *i.e.*, the accumulated "sin of the world" throughout all time, are all known to God, and He is the "Judge of all" (Heb. xii. 23; Rom. iii. 6). When therefore He

dealt with sin in the sacrifice, and on the person of Christ, the character and whole extent of sin was before Him, and the punishment of sin—which sin to its utmost extent deserved—was borne by Christ. As He was manifested to take away *sins*, for that *purpose* (1 John iii. 5, R.V.), so also He “appeared” to take away “the sin of the *world*,” the whole *extent* of sin (John i. 29).

The virtue of the Atonement is not limited to the sins of those who are ultimately saved. The Son of man, we are told in Matt. xx. 28, gave “His life a ransom (*i.e.*, He died) for many.” “He died for all” is the inspired witness of 2 Cor. v. 15. In 1 Tim. ii. 6, it is emphatically stated that He “gave himself a ransom for all,” where no doubt can be that the word “all” embraces those whom God desires should be saved—who have not “come to the knowledge of the truth” (ver. 4). Such words cannot for a moment be restricted to those whom God has *chosen* for salvation.

Propitiation without substitutionary suffering and death is inconceivable. Propitiation for the world, yet not for the sins of all men would not avail for all men. In what then does the sin of the world consist, if not in sins? No Christian of ordinary spiritual intelligence thinks of atonement, or propitiation, for “sin in the flesh,” for the corrupt nature of fallen man, and though all can understand the condemnation of sin as an evil principle “in the flesh,” the conception of its punishment is too absurd to deserve notice. Men are responsible for their sins. They are not accountable for having inherited an evil nature.

If we exclude the *sins* of the world from the cross and its virtues, what in that case remains for which propitiation can be needed? For good and just reasons, evident to all, Scripture never speaks of the *sins* of the world, yet, without faith in Christ and His atoning work, nothing is more certain than that men die in their sins.

The relation of the Atonement to those who die in their sins becomes more evident when we remember that redemption is entirely a superstructural work founded on Atonement. Atonement, of which propitiation is the completion, has been made for the world. But redemption—consequent on faith—takes the sinner out of his condition in “sins” (which are forgiven, see Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14), and puts him on the sure and stable foundation of Christ’s work of Atonement.

It would be error of the gravest sort to affirm that because Christ bore the sin of the world in Atonement, therefore the world, *i.e.*, all men, must be ultimately saved. It would be no less error to deny that, if all men rejected the grace of God in the Gospel, God has been infinitely glorified by the sufferings and death of His Son on behalf of men. For such denial would make the virtue of Christ’s work contingent, or dependent, on its acceptance by men. If righteousness is by law, says the apostle, Christ has died in vain for the sinner’s justification (Gal. ii. 21). Yet nothing can make void His death for God’s glory, seeing it forms the righteous basis on which mercy and salvation, peace and forgiveness are offered to all. But that Christ should suffer for sin in Atonement, and that men should suffer for the same sin on account of rejecting His Atonement, is in no wise a violation of divine justice.

Nor is God unrighteous who takes vengeance on the sinner that dies in the guilt of his own sins without the added guilt of despising His grace in Christ. His judgment on the sinner is just, apart from His grace in Christ. From first to last the work of Atonement is a work of *grace*, and not of *debt* to sinners. Sufferings that were non-atoning the Lord endured all His life. But His vicarious sufferings alone formed the broad and everlasting foundation of Atonement; a foundation wide as the world itself, and stable as the throne on high. Yet all His suffer-

ings were voluntary, and in obedience to His Father's will.

It may be alleged that Scripture never says that Christ bore the *sins* of the world. This is true. But we must remember that He who was sent into the world that "the world (all men) might be saved through Him" (John iii. 17)—He who gave His flesh "for the life of the world," for all men (John vi. 51), has been rejected by the world, and consequently its destiny is fixed. As a Christ-rejecting and corrupt system, darkness has overtaken it (John xi. 35, 36), and it now rolls on to its eternal doom. Its individual *sins* are therefore spoken of as *sin*, and overshadowed by its conviction of the terrible sin of unbelief (John xvi. 9). Yet the truth abides—because it rests on the imperishable foundation of Christ's sufferings and death—that Christ Himself is the propitiation "for the whole world"—not for "our sins" only, but for all men (1 John ii. 2). Whoever therefore believes on Him is brought out of the world's darkness, delivered from its judgment, and saved from its coming doom.

As God's Lamb—the "*amnos*," or sacrificial lamb, John i. 19,—the Lord Jesus by His sacrifice for "the sin of the world" has taken away sin, not from the world, but from before the face of God as the bar to man's approach to Him. Where before He saw sin, He now sees the sacrifice. Thus he who comes to God on the ground of the sacrifice is cleansed from his sins, and fitted to stand before Him.

Between our Lord's *life*-sufferings and His *cross*-sufferings we must distinguish sharply. The former were never at any time sacrificial.

In their cause, and in their effect Christ's sufferings from man are in direct contrast with His sufferings from God. As the faithful witness for God in the world He testified that its works were evil. He was hated and persecuted, scorned and cast out by men. He suffered thus, not as a sin bearer, but,

on account of His righteous testimony in the midst of evil. In those scriptures which depict his sufferings from the hand of man we see judgment upon man himself as the result. On the contrary, His sufferings under God's hand were inflicted because of our sins. He "suffered for *sins*, just for *unjust*" (1 Pet. iii. 18), to make Atonement; but in no way from God's hand for righteousness' sake. The effect of this is that grace, and grace alone, flows out to all.

Scripture records no word or fact to warrant the thought that Christ was bearing sins vicariously before He endured the sufferings of the cross. This evil teaching, so abhorrent to a spiritual mind, puts our Lord under wrath before His "hour" and "baptism" of suffering, and represents Him as bearing on account of our sins a modified form of sacrificial suffering all His life. While professing to eat the flesh of the sacrifice "roast with fire," the advocates of this doctrine speak of a modified, or toned down, form of sacrificial suffering, and thus eat the flesh "sodden with water" in the face of the divine prohibition (Ex. xii. 9).

At the last passover feast when the "hour" was approaching for which He came into the world (John xii. 27), He spoke of having desired to eat that passover with His disciples "before" He suffered (Luke xxii. 15). At the institution of His memorial feast which immediately followed, He again spoke to His disciples, but now of His body "given" and of His blood "poured out" for them. In words few and simple He told them of the purpose for which He suffered, and for which He died.

For "the suffering of death"—in order that He "should taste death for every one," our Lord was made "lower than the angels" (Heb. ii. 9), who are not capable of suffering death (Luke xx. 36). He laid down His life that He might take it again. We are exhorted to follow Him in surrendering all, even our

lives, for the brethren (1 John iii. 16). But He also, and in the very moment of His death, "yielded up (or dismissed) His spirit" (Matt. xxvii. 50). It was His own act, and a witness of His deity, Who never was, or could be for a moment, *liable* to death. Yet He could, and did die. He, "the living One . . . became dead" (Rev. i. 18). He bowed in meekness to the hatred and rage of them that slew Him. It is no less true that He by His own will died for us, than that He was slain for us. For though His life was "taken from the earth" (Acts viii. 33), it was not, it could not be, taken from Him before He laid it down of Himself (John x. 18).

After He laid down His life, had surrendered Himself to the enmity and will of His enemies (John xviii. 4-11), and said "this is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke xxii. 53), He, doubtless, suffered many inflictions from the hand of man. But now also, as through the whole of His life and ministry on earth while enduring "so great contradiction from sinners against Himself" (Heb. xii. 3), He was perfect in obedience and submission to His Father's will, and received all as coming from His hand (Matt. xi. 26).

His anticipatory sorrow and suffering in view of the cross, and all that He felt and endured on account of His holiness, compassion and sympathy in the midst of the evil, the sorrows, and the sufferings of others, were incidental to His solitary path of perfect devotion to His Father's will. But in none of these was there any element of Atonement. By their very nature they were not substitutionary, not such sufferings as He endured under the hand of God, and which came from Him alone.

In Gethsemane He cried, and was heard (Heb. v. 7). On the cross He cried, but was not heard (Ps. xxii. 42). After He had delivered Himself up He said, "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11). The cup

given Him to drink was yet before Him. From His Father's hand he received it. That cup of pure judgment, of absolute vengeance, of unique suffering, such as no righteous one had ever known before, or can know again—the cup of God's wrath against sin was still untasted. Not one drop of its contents—unknown and unknowable to us—had yet been pressed to His holy lips. O their deep shame, and guilty ignorance, too, who ask us to believe that our adorable Lord Jesus had been made to drink of that cup all His days, from the manger to the cross! In their use of Isa. liii. 4 they forget, or ignore, that Matt. viii. 17 interprets the first clause of that verse for us, and that 1 Pet. ii. 24, 25 applies the whole of verse 5 to the Lord's atoning sufferings “on the tree.”

The Christian's Relation to Sin.

Christ's death “for sin” (Rom. viii. 3) is also His death “unto sin” (vi. 10), because of its efficacy to “put away sin” for eternity (Heb. ix. 26, 28). In the Roman Epistle the saints at Rome (i. 7) are exhorted to reckon *themselves* dead to sin and alive to God (vi. 11). This exhortation is grounded on the inferentially known truth that all Christians have died to sin (Rom. vi. 2), and are consequently in the same negative relation to sin as Christ Himself. They have thus “died *with* Christ” (ver. 8). They are associated “with” Christ as having themselves also died to sin, and if “with” Him in death-relation to sin, they must be also “with” Him in life-relation to God, *i.e.*, associated “with” Him as alive to God. The inspired apostle directs our attention in Rom. vi. 1-11, not to *revealed* truth, but to *known* truth, to truth known by inference. When he speaks of “*knowing* this, that our old man is crucified” with Christ (ver. 6), he indicates a truth which every saved person is privileged and responsible to *infer*, and to *know* as derived from the foundational facts of the Gospel, even if no inspired inference from these had been written.

Christ's death *to* sin is not substitutionary. If it had been substitutionary—if Christ had died *to* sin *instead* of us, then it could not be said, "*we* have died *to* sin" (Rom. vi. 2). nor could saints be exhorted to "*reckon*" themselves dead *to* sin (ver. 11). Such reckoning would be sheer unbelief. For as Christ's death "*for* sin" (Rom. viii. 3) instead of us, saves us from dying for sin, so His death *to* sin instead of us, would preserve us from death to sin.

Earnest students of the Word have taught that God, and He alone, *sees* us dead with Christ, and that we, because of our continual failure, do not see ourselves as we are seen by Him. We therefore *reckon* ourselves dead with Christ. This interpretation of the word "*reckon*" as used in Rom. vi. 11 is based on the very erroneous idea that being "*dead to sin*" is a *positive* relation to sin, and consequently it is, in some way, to be practically expressed in our walk as Christians. But as the truth only is holy (Eph. iv. 24), it makes holy, *i.e.*, it sanctifies in the practical sense (John xvii. 17); and as the truth of our being dead *to* sin with Christ is of the utmost practical importance as formative of Christian character and conduct, we must refuse the utterly senseless doctrine that enjoins upon us the acceptance of death in a practical sense. That we *have* died *to* sin with Christ is Paul's doctrine. There can be no second death *to* sin, or dying *to* sin, save in utter unbelief and flagrant denial of the truth that we *are* dead *to* sin according to the teaching of the Word. It seems hardly necessary to remark that 1 Cor. xv. 31 has no bearing whatever on our death to sin.

Christ's death-relation *to* sin is not the procuring cause of blessing now or hereafter known and enjoyed through grace. Yet as the blessed and everlasting consequence of His death for sin "*once for all*" (Rom. vi. 10) because of its efficacy in putting away sin for ever, "*He* dies no more, death has dominion over *Him* no more" (ver. 9).

In His death for sin, Christ has died to sin. In this He is alone. We have died to sin spiritually and morally. As men in Christ we own the judgment of our condition in the flesh expressed in the judgment of our sins in the cross, Christ having borne our sins for us. He has died for sin, and being now raised from the dead He dies no more, death no more has dominion over Him. For the death that He died (for sin) He died unto sin once for all (vers. 9, 10).

We, as believers, know that our old man is crucified (ver. 6), and we add, "crucified with Christ" because we are now associated with Him in our death-relation to sin for eternity. Not Christ only has died to sin, but we, whose sins have been borne by Him, and whose condition in "flesh of sin" has thereby been condemned—we, in a moral sense, have been crucified with Him. Hence, we have the inferential conclusion embodied in the exclamation of the apostle, "we who have died to sin" ver. 2).

By an offering for sin (Rom. viii. 3)—by His dealing with our sins in judgment on the person of Christ, God has judged and condemned our condition as fallen men, for whose sins Christ died. God's judgment of our fallen condition, which we learn at the cross, we are entitled to speak of as *our* crucifixion in that condition. Therefore we can say that we have died to sin, and we are NOW dead to sin. Yet being delivered through grace from our fallen condition, and in view of the prime truth that Christ died for us, we reckon ourselves not only dead to sin, but NOW also alive to God—in this relation to God with and in Christ for ever. We are called not only to believe what is revealed, but to know and understand with spiritual intelligence these blessed, holy, and eternal verities (Col. i. 9).

T.J.L.

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OR

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