

# The Atonement

By Loraine Boettner

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## The Atonement

The two great objectives to be accomplished by Jesus Christ in His mission to this world were, first, the removal of the curse under which mankind labored as a result of the disobedience and fall, and second, the restoration of men to the image and fellowship of God. Both of these were essential to salvation. The work of Christ in reconciling God and men we call the Atonement; and this doctrine, we believe, lies at the very heart of the Christian system.

In the nature of the case we are altogether dependent on Scripture for our knowledge concerning this doctrine and can know only what God has seen fit to reveal concerning it. Human philosophy and speculation can contribute practically nothing toward its solution, and should be held in abeyance. Our present purpose is to give a systematized account of what the Scriptures teach concerning it, and to show that this fits in perfectly with the longings and aspirations of an enlightened spiritual nature.

In one of Paul's most condensed statements of Christian truth we read: 'For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried; and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,' I Cor. 15:3. In this statement first place is given to the death of Christ. 'Christ died for our sins' was the fundamental fact of the early Christian message, the corner-stone of its faith. But as soon as this simple fact is stated a number of vital questions are bound to arise. In order that we may have an intelligent understanding of this vital truth it is necessary that we know precisely what it was that Christ accomplished on the cross and how He did it. We cannot rest content with teaching that leaves the central doctrine of our faith shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. This does not mean that all mystery can be removed. But the Scriptures do supply the interpretation of the death of Christ that the inquiring mind legitimately asks for, and the salient factors concerning it should be known by all Christian people. Relieving that the Bible is God's word to man, and that the statements of Scripture regarding the death of Christ were meant to be understood by ordinary Christian men and women, we shall not be deterred from this study by those who deprecate any 'theory of the atonement.' Rather we hold it to be our task and privilege under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit to 'search the Scriptures' until we reach that understanding which satisfies the mind and heart and conscience, and leads to certainty and finality.

We cannot expect to give a full explanation of the Atonement any more than we can give a full explanation of the nature of electricity, or of the force of gravity, or of our own mental and physical processes. But the main outlines of the plan of salvation are clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and it is both our privilege and our duty to acquaint ourselves with as much of that plan as God has seen fit to reveal. We are told, for instance, in broad terms that we are members of a fallen race, that God has given His only-begotten Son for our redemption, and that salvation is through Him and not through any works which we ourselves are able to do. Certainly anyone who accepts these facts and acts upon them will be saved. Yet, accepting these facts and acting upon them would appear to represent only a minimum of faith, and God has made it possible for us greatly to enrich and expand our knowledge of the way of salvation if we will but give careful attention to His word.

By way of background for this subject we are to remember that after God had created man He established certain moral laws by which man was to be governed, and solemnly announced that disobedience to these laws would bring an awful punishment. As a pure test of obedience man was given permission to eat of every tree of the garden except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In regard to that tree he was told: 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' But man deliberately and defiantly disobeyed that command. Through that disobedience he not only corrupted his moral nature, but made necessary the infliction of the prescribed penalty. In view of God's previously expressed good will toward man, the large degree of liberty granted to him, and his full knowledge of the consequences, this disobedience was especially heinous; because through it man in effect transferred his allegiance from God to the Devil.

Moreover, by his fall Adam corrupted not only himself but all of his posterity, since by divine appointment in this test he acted as their federal head and representative. Had man been left to suffer the penalty alone, he would have experienced not only physical death, but spiritual death as well, which means eternal separation from God and therefore endless progress in sin and suffering. Like the Devil and the demons, who also are fallen creatures and who have been abandoned to their fate, man was morally polluted and guilty and had neither the desire nor the ability to reform himself. Furthermore, it is very evident that no member of this fallen race was capable of paying the debt owed by any other, since each one was preoccupied with his own sin. Even if it had been possible to have found a truly righteous man who was also willing to bear the penalty for others, he could at most have delivered but one other person since he himself was only a man. Nowhere outside the Trinity was there a person either capable or willing to take the place of another, no one capable of suffering and dying, the one for the many. Nor had man the slightest grounds on which to base a request that he be excused from the penalty of the law. Hence his condition was truly desperate.

But fortunately for man there was One both able and willing to perform that service. It was for this purpose that the Lord Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, became incarnate and performed for man a double service, discharging, on the one hand, the penalty through His own suffering and death, and on the other, restoring to man holiness and life through His perfect obedience to the moral law. Thus was redeemed a multitude which no man can number. How appropriate, then, the words of Peter, 'Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with Precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ,' I Peter 1 :18, 19. And how appropriate the words of the heavenly songs, 'Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth,' Rev. 5:9, 10; 'Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever,' Rev. 7:12; 'Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest,' Rev. 15:3, 4.

### *The Infinite Value Of Christ's Sacrifice*

The chief mystery in regard to the Atonement appears to lie in the fact that God chooses to accept the unmerited sufferings of Christ as a just equivalent for the suffering due to sinners. The question then arises, How can the suffering of an innocent person be set to the account of a guilty person in such a way that the guilty person is freed from the obligation to suffer? Or, to state the question more specifically, How can the suffering which was endured by Christ be set to the credit of His people, and how can that suffering suffice to save the millions of mankind, or even all of the people of the world if they would but trust Him? Or again, as it is sometimes asked although somewhat erroneously, How can God, the first person, take the sin of a guilty man, the second person, and lay it on Christ, an innocent third person ?

That this last form of the question does not state the case correctly is quite evident; and here we get at the heart of the matter. For when God, the first person, takes the sin of a guilty man, a second person, and lays it on Christ, He lays it not on a third person but on Himself. There is no third person in this transaction, because Christ is God, Deity incarnate. This last consideration many people fail to keep in mind, and their failure to do so is often times the reason for their rejection of the whole Christian system, which then is, of course, made to appear fantastic, unreal, unjust. If God had taken the sin of one man and laid it on another mere man, that would indeed have been a flagrant violation of justice as the Unitarians and Modernists charge.

In view of the fact that Christ is God, and therefore a Person of infinite value and dignity, we have no hesitation in saying that the crucifixion of Christ was not only the world's worst crime, but that it was a

worse crime than that which would have been committed if the entire human race had been crucified. Isaiah tells us that in comparison with man God is so great that even 'the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are accounted as the small dust of the balance,' 40:15. Christ's Deity and creatorship is set forth by John when he says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made ... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not,' 1:1, 3, 10. Paul declares that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,' I Cor. 5:19; and in another place adds, 'In Him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through Him, and unto Him; and He is before all things, and in Him all things consist,' Col. 1:16, 17. Even the first chapter of Genesis, which gives an account of the original creation, declares this same truth; for when read in the light of the New Testament we see that it was counsel within the Trinity when it was said, 'Let us make man in our image.' Paul states this same general truth in even more graphic words when he declares that the rulers of this world 'crucified the Lord of glory,' I Cor. 2:8, and when he refers to 'the Church of the Lord' (the King James Version reads, 'the Church of God') 'which He purchased with His own blood,' Acts 20:28. For sinful man thus to crucify his God was an infinitely heinous crime. Whatever may be said about the Atonement, it certainly cannot be said that the debt paid by Christ was of lesser value than that which would have been paid if all of those for whom He died had been left to suffer their own penalty.

In order to illustrate a little more clearly the infinite value of Christ's atonement we should like to use a very simple illustration. Doubtless all of us, for instance, have killed thousands of insects such as ants, beetles, grasshoppers. Perhaps we have even killed millions of them if we have plowed a field or set a large brush fire. Or perhaps we have killed a considerable number of birds or animals, either for food or because they had become pests. Yet we suffer no accusing conscience. But if we kill just one man we do have an accusing conscience which condemns us bitterly; for in that case we have committed murder. Even if we could imagine a whole world full of insects or animals and if we could kill them all at one stroke, we would have no accusing conscience. The reason for this difference is that man was created in the image of God, and is therefore of infinitely greater value than the insects or animals. Now in a manner similar to this, Christ, who was God incarnate, was not only of greater value than a man but was of greater value than the sum total of all men; and therefore the value of His suffering and death was amply sufficient to redeem as many of the human race as God sees fit to call to Himself. Christ did not, of course, suffer eternally as men would have done, nor was His pain as great as the sum total of that which would have fallen on man; but because He was a Person of infinite value and dignity His suffering was what God considered a just equivalent for that which was due to all of those who were to be redeemed.

And as we who have been redeemed read that awful account of the crucifixion let us remember that we had a part in it, that it was for our sin and as our Substitute that He suffered and died, regardless of whether or not we personally clamored for His death or drove the nails. In order for us to understand how it was possible for Christ to have accomplished this work of redemption it is necessary for us to keep in mind the fact that He possessed two natures, one Divine and the other human, and that it was in His human nature that He suffered on the cross. But in our own persons -- which are composed of two natures in vital union, the spiritual and the physical-- whatever can be affirmed of either of our natures can be affirmed of us as persons. If a certain man is good, or if he is a keen thinker, or happy, or sorrowful, we say that he as a person is good, intellectual, happy, or sorrowful. If his body weighs one hundred and fifty pounds, or if he suffers a broken leg, or is sick, we say that that person weighs that amount or suffers those things. Our spiritual nature is the more important, more dominant and controlling; yet what happens to either of our natures happens to us as persons. In a similar manner, Christ's Divine nature was the more important, more dominant and controlling; but since the two natures were vitally united what He experienced in either He experienced as a Person. Hence His suffering on the cross was God's suffering, and His death was in a real sense God's death for His people. This means that the death of Christ, through which the Atonement was accomplished, was a stupendous event; the most important event in the history of the universe, the central event in all history.

That an atonement of some kind was necessary if human beings were to be pardoned is very evident. The justice of God demands that sin shall be punished as definitely as it demands that righteousness shall be rewarded. God would not be just if He failed to do either. Consequently, the law which was set forth in the beginning, that the punishment for sin should be death--involving, of course, not only destruction of the body, but eternal separation of the spirit from God--could not simply be brushed aside or nullified. The honor and holiness of God were at stake, and when man sinned the penalty had to be paid. The idea of vicarious suffering underlay the entire sacrificial system of the Jews, impressing upon them the fact that a righteous God could make no compromise with sin, and that sin must be and eventually would be punished with its merited recompense, death.

In the Incarnation human nature is taken, as it were, into the very bosom of Deity, and is thus accorded an honor far above that given to angels. Although Christ's work of Atonement is completed, He still retains His resurrection body and will retain it forever; and thus will be exhibited one of the strongest possible evidences of God's unity with man and His measureless love for man.

### *No Injustice Done When Our Penalty Was Laid On Christ*

Unitarians and Modernists sometimes object to this doctrine on the grounds that it is unjust to punish one person for the sins of another, and assert that the idea of vicarious suffering is abhorrent. We reply that there can be no injustice or impropriety connected with it when the person who suffers is the same one who, having made the law that such and such an offense should be followed by such and such a penalty and himself actuated by love and mercy, steps in and receives the penalty in his own person while at the same time he makes provision for the reformation of the offender. In financial matters we readily see that there is no injustice when a creditor remits a debt, provided that he assumes the loss himself. Now what God has done in the sphere of redemption is strictly parallel to this. He has assumed the loss Himself and has set us free. In this case God, who is the offended party, took the initiative and (1) permitted a substitution, (2) provided a substitute, and (3) substituted Himself. If after man fell, God, as the sovereign Ruler of the universe and with the purpose of manifesting His attributes of love and mercy before men and angles throughout eternal ages, voluntarily chose to pay man's debt, surely there are no grounds for objecting that such action was not right. And this, Paul tells us, is precisely what God has done: 'God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us to sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God,' Eph. 2:4-9. The work of redemption, including its purpose, method and result, could hardly be stated in clearer language than this.

But it is small wonder that the Unitarians and Modernists object to the Christian doctrine of the Atonement. Since they see in Jesus only a man the Atonement can be, from their point of view, nothing but a colossal travesty, an insult to man's intelligence and to God. Unless Christ was both Divine and human, the whole Christian system is reduced to foolishness. Had Christ been only a man He no more could have saved others than could Stephen, or Huss, or Lincoln, or any other martyr. God cannot take the sins of a criminal and lay them on a good man, but He can take them and lay them on Himself; and that is what the doctrine of the Atonement teaches us that He has done.

### *The Atonement - The Significance of Christ's Death*

If we compare the manner in which the service of the world's greatest men have been rendered, and that in which Christ's work of redemption was rendered, we are immediately impressed with an outstanding contrast. While the service of men is rendered during their lifetime, and while Christ too, for that matter,

lived a life of unparalleled service, the climax of His work came at its very close, and our salvation is ascribed pre-eminently to His suffering and death. Practically all of the material recorded in the Gospels has to do with the events which occurred during the last three years of His life, and approximately one-third of the material has to do with the events of the last week, commonly known as Passion Week. The prominence thus given to the closing scenes indicates very clearly that the distinctive work of Our Lord was accomplished not by His life but by His death. Neither His example nor His teaching reveals the love and mercy and justice of God so convincingly as does His death; and consequently the cross has become par excellence of the Christian symbol.

During the latter part of the public ministry Jesus spoke repeatedly and insistently of the death which He was to suffer at Jerusalem. 'From that time,' says Matthew, marking the beginning of a Period, 'began Jesus to show unto His disciples, that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed,' 16:21. 'He took unto Him the twelve,' says Luke, 'and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. For He shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: and they shall scourge and kill Him,' 18:51-33. When Moses and Elijah appeared in glory at the time of the Transfiguration their talked with Jesus concerning 'His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem,' Luke 9:31. We are told that when the time drew near that He should be received up 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,' Luke 9:51, knowing full well what awaited Him there. With such majestic determination did He press forward toward the cross that the disciples were 'amazed' and 'afraid,' Mark 10:32. 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished,' He said to the disciples, Luke 12:50. Loving His people with an infinite love, and having come to earth specifically for their redemption, He longed to suffer and to accomplish His appointed work. In these and numerous other statements He shows His preoccupation with His death, and that in such a manner as to make clear that in His mind it constituted the most significant part of His work.

That the specific purpose of Christ's death was to secure forgiveness for others is taught directly in Scripture. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins,' said He as He instituted the Lord's Supper which through all succeeding generations was to be observed as a memorial of His death, Matt. 26:28. 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many,' Mark 10:45. 'I lay down my life for the sheep,' John 10:15. 'Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself,' John 10:17, 18.

It is not enough to recognize Christ as a teacher while rejecting Him as the atoning Savior. In the conversation with Nicodemus He promptly brushed aside the complimentary words, 'we know that thou art a teacher come from God,' and declared that until one is born anew he cannot even so much as see the kingdom of God. And similarly the pity of the 'Daughters of Jerusalem,' although doubtless sincere, was rejected apparently because it did not recognize the fact that His suffering was not for Himself but for others,--'Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves,' Luke 23:25. And the rending of the veil of the temple, which symbolized that the way into the presence of God had been opened for all men, occurred not at His baptism, nor at the Sermon on the Mount, but at His death.

The same teaching concerning the death of Christ is found throughout the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, for instance, pointedly conscious that he had received the cleansing which comes through faith in Christ, places His atoning death at the very heart of his theological system. 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us,' Gal. 3:13. 'Him who knew no sin He [that is, God] made to be sin on our behalf [that is, laid on Him the punishment due for sin]; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,' II Cor. 5:21. 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,' I Cor. 15:3. He is the One whom 'God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in His blood,' Rom, 3:25. 'I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified,' I Cor. 2:2.

Peter declares that 'Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God,' I Peter 3:18; and again that He 'bare our sins in His body upon the tree,' I Peter 2:24. John says, 'The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin,' I John 1:7; and 'He is the propitiation for our sins,' I John 2:2. 'Apart from shedding of blood there is no remission,' wrote the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 9:22; and again, 'Now once at the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself,' 9:26. And in John's Revelation the triumphant Christ is pictured as 'arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood,' 19:13.

Even in the Old Testament this doctrine was clearly anticipated. In the Messianic 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Isaiah we read: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all ... He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due... When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin ... He shall justify many; and He shall bear their iniquities. . . .He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors,' vss. 5-12.

In appointing the lamb as the principal animal for the morning and evening sacrifice in ancient Israel, God chose the animal which is at one and the same time the most harmless and gentle and the most attractive and pleasing of all the domestic animals, and thus emphasized both the innocence and the inherent value of the victim whose life was taken. The people were thus taught that their sins were forgiven and their lives spared only because another who was innocent and virtuous took their place and died in their stead. The term 'Lamb of God,' when applied to Christ, calls to mind the Old Testament sacrifices and invariably refers to His sacrificial death. John the Baptist, for instance, pointed out Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world,' John 1:29. Peter says that we were redeemed, 'not with corruptible things, with silver or gold ...but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ,' I Peter 1:18, 19. In the Book of Revelation the redeemed are portrayed as those who have 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,' 7:14. And since Christ in His relationship with His people manifests so preeminently the attributes of gentleness and tenderness, and since He rules them in and through love, we are further given to understand that all opposition to Him is unprovoked and malignant.

### *Significance Of The Term 'Blood'*

The term 'blood' as used in theological language is, of course, to be understood as a figure of speech. It is used as a synonym for Christ's atoning death, and it designates the price which He paid for the redemption of His people. There are, as might be expected, many in our day who take offense at the term 'blood,' and wish to earn their salvation by their own good works. But the New Testament, as if anticipating this very offense, not only repeatedly asserts that salvation is not by works, but makes direct reference to the 'blood' of Christ some thirty-five or forty times; and in the Old Testament there are innumerable references to the blood of the animals which were used in the ceremonies and rituals which prefigured the death of Christ. Salvation in all ages has been through Christ alone; and the Old Testament saints who worshiped God in His appointed way of sacrifice and poured-out blood looked to the same Savior as do we who live in the Christian era. 'The life of the flesh is in the blood,' said the Lord to Moses, 'and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life,' Lev. 17:11. When the blood is poured out, the person or animal dies. Under the ceremonial law the blood with which atonement was made was secured in such a way that the life of the victim was always forfeited. In the twelfth chapter of Exodus we are given an account of the Passover, with its sprinkling of blood and the deliverance of all the firstborn of Israel from death. On the day of annual Atonement the high priest was to sprinkle the blood of the bullock and of the goat over the mercy seat and upon the horns of the altar, Lev. 16:1-34. The various Old Testament blood rituals were but prophetic types or prefigurements of the great sacrifice which later was to be made by Christ when He offered Himself for the sins of His people.

The teaching of the New Testament concerning the blood is very explicit. We have seen that Jesus' own words in instituting the Lord's Supper were, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins,' Matt. 26:28. Paul repeatedly asserts this truth: 'Now being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him,' Rom. 5:9. 'Jesus Christ in whom we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,' Eph. 1:3, 7. 'But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ,' Eph. 2:13. Christ has 'made peace through the blood of His cross,' Col. 1:20. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, contrasting the work of Christ with that of the high priest in ancient Israel says that 'Christ having come a high priest ... not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bull, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God' Heb. 9:11-14. John writes, 'The blood of Jesus His Son cleanseth us from all sin,' I John 1 :7. And in the songs of praise to the Redeemer, recorded in the book of Revelation, we hear the words, 'Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. . . . Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing,' Rev. 5 :9, 12.

So let no one take offense at the term 'blood.' Since salvation was purchased for us by the vicarious suffering and death of Christ, and since that suffering and death is symbolized by the blood, it is but natural that both the Old and the New Testament should mention the blood repeatedly. Many persons have tried to gain salvation by other methods, by church membership, pledge signing, good resolutions, meritorious works, etc., only to find that such methods invariably end in failure. So clearly and constantly and emphatically do the New Testament writers assert that the efficacy of Christ's work is to be ascribed to His death, His blood, His cross, that we are justified in asserting that the Scripturalness or un-Scripturalness of the various present day theories of the atonement can be fairly tested by the place which they give to His death.

To the unsaved nothing seems more unreasonable and meaningless than the assertion that salvation is to be obtained through the blood of Christ. The Scriptures, of course, recognize this condition of the unregenerate heart, and declare that, 'The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness,' and then add by way of contrast, 'but unto us who are saved it is the power of God,' I Cor. 1:18. Those who have experienced the cleansing and forgiveness which comes through this faith know that the crucified and risen Lord is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near unto God through Him, and that there is no salvation in any other.

And unless Christ did thus give His life a sacrifice for others we are at a loss to know why He died. We have seen that the penalty which God originally prescribed for sin was the loss of life,--and like any other penalty it can be justly inflicted only where the law has been violated. But Christ suffered the penalty of death even though He had no sin of His own. Consequently He must have died for the sins of others. Unless He did thus die, His voluntary surrender to death, and that at the early age of thirty-three, must be looked upon as utter foolishness, as, in fact, criminal suicide.

### *Not Merely A Martyr's Death*

There are many who deny that the death of Christ had any value as an atonement. The most common alternative view is that He died merely as a martyr. But apart from the fact that a mere martyr's death would leave most of the distinctive Christian doctrines without any adequate foundation, the narratives themselves make it quite clear that something profoundly different was involved. Compare His feeling, in view of death, with that of Paul: 'having the desire to depart,' Phil. 1:23; "The time of my departure is come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me the crown

of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that love His appearing,' II Tim. 4:6-8. Jesus, on the other hand, was filled with anguish. 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour,' John 12:27. We are told that 'His sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground,' Luke 22:44. And as He hung on the cross we hear the despairing cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Matt. 27:46. As Dr. A. H. Strong has said, 'If Christ was simply a martyr, then He was not a perfect example; for many a martyr has shown greater courage in prospect of death, and in the final agony has been able to say that the fire which consumed him was 'a bed of roses.' Gethsemane, with its mental anguish, is apparently recorded in order to indicate that Christ's sufferings even on the cross were not mainly physical sufferings.'

As Jesus hung on the cross He was, in His human nature, the true sin-offering for His people, and as such, it was necessary that He suffer alone. God can have no association whatever with sin, since in His sight it is infinitely heinous. And, as in the Old Testament ritual for the sin-offering, this was symbolized by the burning of the flesh of the bullock outside of the camp (even the offering itself being treated as offensive and polluted since in the mind of the offerer it stood representative of and was in some way associated with his sin), so Jesus, as He bore in His own body the full weight of the penalty of sin, was temporarily cut off from the Father's presence and paid the entire cost of redemption without help from any other. The darkened heavens, and the cry, 'My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?' indicate as much. He was acutely conscious not only of the pain from the nails, but also of a break in that intimate and loving fellowship which He had always enjoyed with the Father. Since Jesus in His human nature was subject to the limitations which are common to men, it was as possible for Him to experience the sense of separation from the Father as it was for Him to be ignorant of the time of the end of the world, or to suffer pain or hunger. But during the crucifixion, as He bore a burden of sin such as had never been borne and could never be borne by any mere man, He went through an experience far more awful and terrifying than is possible for any mere martyr. In contrast with His sufferings, the Christian martyrs were deeply conscious of God's presence as they yielded up their lives. If Christ's death was only a martyr's death it might well fill us with terror and despair, for it would show that the holiest man who ever lived was utterly forsaken by God in the hour of His greatest need.

Death is primarily the separation of the soul from God; and physical death, or the separation of the soul from the body, is only a by product and a relatively unimportant consequence of that greater catastrophe. Jesus did not suffer the pangs which are experienced by lost souls in hell, but in paying the penalty for His people, He did suffer death in its most essential nature, which is separation from God. And while His sufferings were not identical, either in intensity or in length of time endured, with those which His people would have suffered had they been left to their own sin, in view of the infinite worth and dignity of the Sufferer they were nevertheless a full equivalent to those sufferings.

Let us keep in mind that it was not Christ's divine nature, but only His human nature, which was subject to suffering and death, as it was only His human nature which was subject to temptation, hunger, thirst, sleep, etc. While we do not fully understand the relationship which exists between His two natures, we have a faint analogy in our own persons in which a spiritual and a physical nature are united; and on the basis of our own experience we know that what He experienced in either nature He experience as a person, that is, as the God-man. This latter fact is of the utmost importance since it explains why His work of redemption was possessed of infinite value, sufficient to save all those who put their trust in Him. And again, while we do not fully understand the relationship which exists between the two natures, and while the analogy does not hold at all points, we may picture His divine nature during the crucifixion as not only fully sympathetic with His human nature, but as looking down upon His human nature calmly and serenely as the moon in its majesty looks down upon the troubled sea.

It seems quite evident that the work of redemption, which together with its wider effects may also be designated as the spiritual Reformed-creation of the souls of men, was a greater work than the original

creation of the universe. When the starry heavens were brought into existence and spread throughout the vast bounds of space, that work, while requiring great power and wisdom, was accomplished at God's spoken command. Such creation was comparatively easy, and is referred to as but 'the work of His finger,' Ps. 8:3. 'He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast,' Ps. 33:9. But when the work of redemption was to be accomplished, God, in the person of Christ, took upon Himself human nature with its attendant weaknesses, was born a helpless babe in low condition, underwent the hardships of this life, was scoffed at and rejected by the religious and political rulers of the nation, suffered the cruel pain and cursed death of the cross, was buried, and continued under the power of death for a time. While the work of creation was accomplished through a mere exercise of power and wisdom, the work of redemption was accomplished only at an infinite cost of suffering on the part of God Himself. As man's soul is of incomparably greater value than his body, so the redemption of the souls of men was an incomparably greater work than the original creation of the universe. Christ's work of redemption is now seen to have been the central event of all history.

We do not mean to imply that man's salvation was completed by the work of Christ on the cross. His words, 'I have accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do,' John 17:4, and 'It is finished,' John 19:30, relate to the objective atonement which He provided for the sins of men. But the great purpose of His coming, that of making men subjectively just and holy, was not yet fulfilled. As the work of providence follows the work of creation, so the subjective cleansing of the sinner is a continuing process as the redemption which was purchased by Christ is applied by the Holy Spirit to those for whom it was intended. Here enter the works of regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. But this opens up a whole new field of theology, that of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, which we have not space to discuss in this present work.

Thus the death of Christ emerges as the central truth in the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is the link which holds together all of the other distinctive doctrines. The mark of His blood is upon them and signifies their ownership, as the scarlet thread running through every cord and rope of the British navy signifies that it is the property of the crown. It hardly seems possible that, with this central truth written so plainly and so repeatedly across the pages of Scripture, any honest or serious minded persons could arise, as do the Unitarians and Modernists, and declare that the essence of Christianity consists in our following the example of Christ in lives of social service, or that the chief purpose of the Church is to build a new social order in this world. It is very evident, of course, that in our daily lives we are to follow the example of Christ as closely as possible. And in due course of time a new social order, based on justice and improved living conditions, will gradually arise as Christian principles are applied first to the lives of individuals and through them to the life of the community. In many limited social groups we already see the effects of this uplifting process. But Christ's expiatory death is no more an object for our imitation than is the creation of the world. For in His death He took man's place and rendered to divine justice a satisfaction which man himself was utterly unable to render. That Christianity is not primarily a social movement, but a redemptive religion, setting forth a way of escape from sin, is as plain as it is possible for words to make it.

### [The Atonement - The Satisfaction View of the Atonement](#)

Before we can have any adequate understanding or appreciation of the work that Christ has done for us it is necessary that we know something of the nature and effect of sin in the human soul. In substance the Bible tells us that sin is open and defiant rebellion against the law of God. There are, of course, many forms in which it may manifest itself, such as murder, robbery, adultery, lying, profanity, idolatry, pride, envy, covetousness, disrespect for parents. But regardless of the different forms which it may assume essentially and definitely one thing: It is crime committed against God. Perhaps the best known formal definition of sin is that of the Westminster Confession which says, 'Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.' The law of God is moral in the highest sense, and has been given for the good of mankind. It is a revelation of, or a transcript of, God's own character, and is therefore perfect and immutable.

The person who commits sin transfers his allegiance from God to the Devil, although but few seem to realize that they are actually serving the Devil. But the Scripture says, 'He that doeth sin is of the Devil,' I John 3:8. Paul was divinely appointed to preach to the Gentiles, 'to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God,' Acts 26:18. We have the word of Jesus that 'Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin' John 8:34; and to the Pharisees who maliciously opposed Him He said, 'Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do,' John 8:44.

The nature of sin being what it is, it is not surprising that the penalty that God has established against it is severe. That penalty is death. 'In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,' Gen. 2:17, was the clearly announced penalty spoken to Adam at the very beginning of the race. It was repeated by the prophets, e.g., 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.' Ezek. 18:4; and in the New Testament, 'The wages of sin is death,' Rom. 6:23.

We have already pointed out that death in this sense included a great deal more than physical death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, that it was primarily spiritual death, or the eternal separation of the soul from God. In this broader sense death means an abandoned spiritual condition such as that of the Devil and the demons. It involves the immediate loss of the divine favor, the sense of guilt, the corruption of the moral nature (resulting of course in the commission of other and more flagrant transgressions), and the pains of hell. The reward promised for obedience, as is clearly implied in the Genesis account and in later Scripture, was life, the exact opposite of the penalty threatened, not merely physical life as we know it, but eternal life such as is enjoyed by the holy angels. And since Adam by divine appointment stood representative for all of those who were to come after him by natural descent and acted precisely as they would have acted under similar circumstances, the reward for his obedience or the penalty for his disobedience was designed to fall not only on him but equally on them. Thus situated, Adam made his choice,--and fell. The results were disastrous, for by that fall he brought himself and his descendants into a state of depravity, guilt, and condemnation, a state in which the intellect is blinded to spiritual truth, the affections corrupted, and the will enslaved. From that condition there was no possible way of escape--except by divine grace.

That the penalty for sin did relate primarily to man's spiritual nature is seen in the fact that Adam did not die a physical death for 930 years after he had disobeyed, although he died spiritually and felt himself estranged from God the very instant he sinned. It is also shown by the fact that Adam's unregenerate posterity since that time have invariably and persistently gone the way of evil, displaying the same aversion to righteousness and the same affection for sin.

### *Unchangeable Nature Of The Law Against Sin*

The moral law which God gave to man in the beginning was no arbitrary or whimsical pronouncement, but an expression of His being. It showed man what the nature of God was, and was designed to bring man's nature into closer conformity with His nature. It was very explicit, both in its command and in its threatened penalty. Now sin is the absolute contradiction of that nature, and cannot therefore be lightly set aside. In all of His dealings God reveals Himself as a holy, just, and truthful God. As a holy God He hates sin and burns against it with a consuming zeal. As a just God he scrupulously rewards righteousness and punishes sin, for strict justice is as insistent in its demand that sin shall be punished as it is in its demand that righteousness shall be rewarded. God cannot give the reward of obedience for disobedience. The same God who is a God of mercy and who in virtue of His mercy desires to save human souls, is also a God of justice and in virtue of His justice must punish sinners. And as a truthful God He must put into effect the penalty which He has said would be enforced against transgressors. For Him to fail to punish sin would be for Him to remove the penalty against it, to consent to it or to become partaker in it, and therefore to violate His own nature and to destroy the moral order of the universe. Consequently when sin is committed it simply cannot be ignored or

canceled out with mere pardon. The penalty must be paid. God's honor and justice are at stake. However much God in His love might have desired to have saved man, it was not possible for Him to do so until satisfaction was made to the divine law. Hence the truth of the Scripture statement: 'Apart from shedding of blood [i.e., the payment of the prescribed death penalty there is no remission] (of sin), Heb. 9:22.

Hence even if man possessed the power to repent and turn to God, forgiveness could not be granted on the basis of mere repentance. For repentance does not expiate crime, even under civil government. The fact that the murderer, or robber, or adulterer, or liar is sorry does not excuse him from obligation. He must restore what he has taken. He must make right what he has made wrong. Otherwise the injury remains. We instinctively feel that wrong-doing must be balanced by a corresponding penalty. This feeling is especially noticeable after a particularly atrocious crime has been committed. We say that the crime calls for vengeance, and that a moral order which would allow it to go unpunished would not be right. The truly penitent man never feels that his repentance constitutes a ground of acceptance, either with God or with his fellow men. The more sincerely he repents the more truly he recognizes his need of reparation and expiation.

Fortunately for us, God meets the demands of His own holiness and justice and of man's conscience by Himself providing an atonement, a satisfaction. He does not forgive sin merely because He cares so little about it, nor because He is so exclusively the God of love that all other considerations fall into insignificance beside it; but in His own person and by the sacrifice of Himself He pays the penalty which frees man from obligation and provides that righteousness which alone admits him into heaven: For as Dr. Wm. C. Robinson has recently said, 'The cross is not a compromise, but a substitution; not a cancellation, but a satisfaction; not a wiping off, but a wiping out in blood and agony and death.' Thus mercy does not cheat justice. Holiness is rewarded, sin is punished, and the moral order of the universe is maintained in its perfection.

Years ago in England and in our own country there were debtor's prisons in which those who could not pay their debts were incarcerated. The law was inexorable. The man who had borrowed money and squandered or mismanaged it had to go to prison. He could not make things right merely by saying that he was sorry. Some one had to stand the loss, either the borrower or the person from whom it had been borrowed. But if a wealthy friend of the borrower came forward and paid the debt he was set free. In fact, in such a case his freedom became mandatory, for the law was satisfied. And so it is with the Christian doctrine of the atonement. Christ has done for His people exactly what a man does for his friend,—He has paid the debt for them. That is the meaning of the cross. God Himself assumed man's nature, and in that nature took man's place before His own law, suffered its penalty, and saved man through pure grace.

It must be perfectly evident to every one that if God allowed sin to go unpunished, or if He dealt with it in a free and loose manner, it would mean that justice had been cast to the winds and that He was governed by weak sentimentality. In the original creation God made man in His own image and implanted in him a deep sense of moral responsibility. He would be unfaithful to Himself if after having implanted that great principle He did not rule in accordance with it. For He is not only a loving Father but also a righteous Judge. He cannot permit His righteous laws to be violated with impunity. If the sinner is to be forgiven, then for his own sake as well as for the sake of truth and righteousness, that forgiveness must not come in such a way as to diminish or benumb his sense of guilt. While God's love and tenderness are manifested in His forgiveness of sin, that forgiveness must not be accomplished in a manner which fails to show sin to be what it really is, something hateful and painful to God, diametrically opposed to His holy nature and subversive of His rule throughout the universe. Otherwise man will be misled into an easy-going, good-natured carelessness, and will have no adequate understanding or appreciation of the favor that has been granted to him.

For the righteousness of God is not, as so many people seem inclined to believe, mere disinterested benevolence which can pass lightly over sin. It is rather a distinct and separate attribute of the divine nature which demands that sin shall receive its adequate punishment. We regret that so much of our modern theological literature shows an almost complete lack of any adequate sense of the heinousness and guilt of

sin. It is only when men hold superficial views of sin and think that it can be cast off by simple repentance that they deny the need of an expiatory atonement. But in proportion as an aroused conscience tells us that we are sinners we realize how deep is our guilt and cry out for that Savior who alone is 'able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him.'

### *Holiness Is Prior To And Conditions Love*

The most fundamental attribute of God's nature is, not love, but holiness. His holiness may be defined as His self-perpetuating righteousness or purity, in virtue of which He eternally wills and maintains His own moral excellence. He has constituted the universe, and humanity as a part of it, so that it shall express His holiness, - positively by connecting happiness with righteousness, and negatively by connecting unhappiness or suffering with sin. Love, in itself, is irrational and capricious except as it is governed by holiness. And the fact that holiness is logically prior to and conditions love makes it impossible for sin to be pardoned without an atonement. There must be an adequate infliction of misery to offset that sin. Many of the Greek gods were notoriously immoral. But our God is a God of holiness, a God of perfect morality; and He can tolerate no sin. If the forgiveness of sin depended only on the sovereign will of God, there would, of course, be no need for an atonement. In Muhammadanism, for instance, where the sovereignty of God is so emphasized that all other attributes are dwarfed beside it, no need is felt for satisfying divine justice. Muhammadanism holds that God can pardon whom He will, and on whatever grounds He pleases. The immeasurable superiority of Christian theology is evidenced by its clear and emphatic demand that the justice and holiness of God must be maintained and that the affront which has been offered to it by human sin shall not go unpunished. The tendency in some modern systems of theology is to merge holiness and love and to assume that God can forgive sin without an atonement. But such an easy-going optimism either does not know what the holiness of God involves, or fails utterly to understand the heinous nature of sin.

That God is love is, of course, one of the clear revelations of Scripture. And to us who would be forever lost if it were not for His love, that is the crowning revelation of Christianity. But love is not all that God is, and can therefore never adequately express all that God is. It is equally true that God is just and that He must punish sin. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that His attitude toward the workers of iniquity is that of 'a consuming fire' (12:29). The popular literature of our day abounds with many ill-considered assertions of the indiscriminate love of God, as though He were too broadly good to hold man to any real account for sin. But we can never know the depth of the meaning of God's love until it is thrown up against the background of those other lofty conceptions which arise from and are based on a true view of His holiness, righteousness and justice. In brief, we may say that whereas the Modernist reasons, God is love and therefore there is no need for an atonement, the truth is, God is love and therefore He provides an atonement.

This brings us to the question, What is true love? We may say that one person truly loves another when he has a greater desire to please that person than he has to please himself. And the correlated truth is: One person truly loves another when he would rather suffer himself than see that one suffer. In the final analysis there are just two moral principles which may govern one's action: the first is that which has one's own interests as its final motive or supreme object, and is therefore the selfish principle; the second is that which has the interests of others as its final motive and is therefore the self-giving, sacrificial principle. This second is the principle which God manifests in His relations with His people. Consequently the greatest message that any one can hear is that 'God is love,' (I John 4:16) ; for that means that God's holy nature seeks to express itself actively toward him, and that he will therefore be fitted for the divine presence.

On Calvary more than anywhere else the great loving heart of God has been revealed to man. There was love, unspeakable love, 'When God the mighty Maker died for man the creature's sin.' This redeeming love originated in the Trinity and was first exhibited in God's attitude toward man, not in man's attitude toward God; for man showed only opposition and hatred for everything that was good. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,' I John 4:10. 'God

commendeth His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,' Rom. 5:8. The atonement is not the cause, but the effect, of God's love for His people. Because He loved them He redeemed them. In the cross there was revealed to us the love of the Father who proposed the covenant of grace, the love of the Son who in His own body freely accomplished that redemption, and the love of the Holy Spirit who makes that love effective in our hearts. This general thought has been beautifully expressed in a recent book by Dr. Wm. C. Robinson. Says he: 'In the very being of God Himself there are eternal love relationships: 'God is love.' And hence out of that self-moving and self-motivated love ever existing between the Persons of the adorable Trinity love came forth into this world of sin. Out of God's great eternal love, out of the heart of the Trinity came the love of Calvary. Before the foundation of the world He did in love predestinate us unto the adoption of sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself (Eph. 1:4, 5). The eternal Son brought the love of heaven into this world of hate, and lifted it so high on that hill called a skull that every nation shall behold its light, every age be mellowed by its glow,' (The Word of the Cross, p. 118.)

The great classical passage with reference to the Atonement is Rom. 3:25, 26. There Christ is declared to be the One 'Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in His blood, to show His righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for the showing, I say, of His righteousness at this present season: that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.' Here we are told, (1) that God set forth Christ as an effective propitiatory offering; (2) that man is saved by the exercise of faith in the substitutionary suffering and death of Christ; (3) that while up to this time God, in His mercy and in anticipation of the certain coming of a Redeemer, had saved men without exacting an adequate punishment for their sins. He determines that at this time He will provide that adequate and public exhibition of the punishment of sin; and (4) that the purpose of this sacrifice is that God Himself may be just while forgiving and saving the sinner. Because God had in pre-Christian times saved sinners while allowing their sins to go unpunished His own righteousness had been lost sight of and obscured, and it was necessary that an adequate exhibition of the punishment of sin be made before men and angels. The sacrifices of animals in Old Testament times were not real atonements, but only signs and tokens pointing to the real atonement which was to come later. As the Baptist theologian, Dr. A. H. Strong, has boldly expressed it, 'Before Christ's sacrifice, God's administration was a scandal,--it needed vindication. The Atonement is God's answer to the charge of freeing the guilty.'

Hence- the first and primary effect of the atonement is upon God Himself in that through it He is enabled to remain righteous even when pardoning the sinner,--'that He might Himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.' Because God Himself, in the person of Christ, has borne the penalty for sin, He is now able to show Himself as perfectly just and holy while at the same time He grants forgiveness and eternal life to those who put their faith in Christ.

### *Christ Alone Able To Redeem Men*

We have said that man's condition after the fall was one of absolute helplessness, that he was morally alienated from God, and that his whole attitude toward God, so far as he thought of God at all, was one of opposition and enmity. In Scripture language he was 'dead' in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5). In that fallen state, however, he was still able to do works which considered only in themselves or in reference to his fellow men were good,--he was still able to love his family, to deal honestly with his neighbors, to feed the hungry and comfort the sorrowing, etc. But in doing these things he acted only from selfish or humanitarian motives. In no instances were they done with the purpose of honoring or glorifying God. He might give a million dollars to build a hospital, but he could not give so much as a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of Christ. However good his works might appear in themselves, none of them were done with right motives toward God. All of them, therefore, had a vitiating principle, a fatal defect, and could in no wise merit salvation. Man's vital need, then, was not good advice, nor an impressive example of right conduct, but to be 'made alive' spiritually (Eph. 2:1, 5), to be 'born anew' (John 3:3), to experience 'regeneration' and 'renewing' by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Since men were in that ruined and helpless condition there was only one possible way by which they might be saved. That was for another person of infinite value and dignity to take upon himself their nature, that is, human nature, and, with the consent of God, suffer the penalty which was due to them. His higher personality would give unlimited value to his suffering, which would then be a just equivalent for that which was due to them. And at this point comes in the importance of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. For God is not only unity, but tri-personality, so that there are within the Godhead three Persons, each possessing full Deity, the same in substance and equal in power and glory. Hence because of this fact alone it was possible that there might be One who would offer Himself as Mediator between God and man, One possessing a personality of infinite value and dignity who therefore as man's Agent could work out an atonement of infinite value. Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, did offer Himself as such a Mediator between God and man. In order to accomplish that work He became incarnate, uniting Deity and humanity in His person as intimately and harmoniously as our souls and bodies are united in ours. Only Christ, then, in His Divine-human person, that is, as the God-man, was qualified to accept that penalty and discharge that obligation. No other person in all the universe was capable of assuming that role. The sacrifice of no creature could have availed anything. Nor could either the Father or the Holy Spirit as such have performed that work. Only the two-natured Christ was capable of providing redemption. And only in His organic and official union with His people can we find that vital relation which makes His vicarious suffering either possible or just. The entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation is God's account of the work that He has done for man. In strict literalness it might have been called, 'The History of Redemption,' for the main features dealt with are the original creation of man, his fall, his condition after the fall, God's merciful staying of the full execution of the penalty, the long course of preparation for the coming of the Redeemer, the nature of the work performed by the Redeemer when He did come, His ascension to heaven and His future coming when He shall assign all men their eternal rewards.

Consequently, we find that in the accomplishment of that work Christ did not die a natural death. The kind of death that He died was particularly designed to show that satisfaction was being made to divine justice, that somehow He was dying because the penalty of sin is death. Had He been unexpectedly assassinated, or died as a result of accident, or disease, or old age, there would have been no appearance of a satisfaction having been made to satisfy the demands of divine justice. But when He is placed as a criminal before a tribunal, accused, overpowered by the testimony of witnesses, officially condemned to death, and crucified and His life taken from Him in the very prime of His manhood, we are given to understand that on this righteous Person was inflicted the punishment due to criminals, to malefactors, -in short, the punishment due to us as sinners. He died not merely a corporal death, but a particular kind of death in which He experienced the severity of the divine vengeance against sin. By paralleling even in detail the Old Testament ritual for the sin-offering it was made plain that He was our sin-bearer. What He did and suffered He did and suffered, not for any sin of His own, but for that of His people, in their name and on their account. Hence Paul could say, and we can say with him, 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.' Gal. 2:20.

Since man's sin was directed against God, who is an infinitely holy and just Being, and since fallen man if left to himself would have continued to sin throughout endless ages as do the evil and the fallen angels, it is very evident that nothing less than an atonement of infinite value could have rescued him from that condition. This does not mean that Christ suffered as much during the space of one lifetime as His people would have suffered in an eternity of punishment. But it does mean that since the divine and human natures were united in the person of Christ, His suffering possessed a value equal to or rather greater than that which all of His people deserved, and that it was therefore amply sufficient for the redemption of all who put their trust in Him. His suffering was not the same as theirs either in kind or in duration; for He could suffer no remorse because He had no personal sin, and His was terminated within a few hours whereas theirs, due to their endless persistence in sin, would have continued through all eternity. A finite being could never have exhausted that penalty, but an infinite Being can exhaust it in a comparatively short time. But while not

identical with the sufferings that sinners would have borne, His sufferings were of such kind and degree and duration as divine wisdom, interpreting divine justice, decreed was a full legal equivalent of that penalty when suffered vicariously by a divine person. Only when Calvary is regarded as revealing eternal principles of the divine nature can we see how the sufferings of those few hours can suffice to save millions of mankind. Certainly the fundamental conception of Christ's redeeming work as it is set forth in the Scriptures is that through His vicarious suffering and death He made full satisfaction to the justice of God and by His vicarious obedience He has merited eternal life so that all those who by faith accept Him as their Lord and Savior receive, firstly, deliverance from the guilt of sin, so that they are no longer under obligation to suffer for it; secondly, emancipation from the power of sin, so that they are cleansed from it and enabled to live a holy life; and, thirdly, a life of eternal blessedness in heaven.

To those who are accustomed to look upon man as sufficient for all things, the death of Christ and redemption through blood atonement is, of course, nonsense. When it was first announced it was 'unto Jews a stumblingblock, and unto Gentiles foolishness,' but unto them that believed it was 'the power of God, and the wisdom of God,' I Cor 1:23. Some call it repulsive. It is indeed repulsive and humiliating to the self-confident natural man. 'When Unitarians and Modernists represent it as a cruel demand on God's part and as an expiation from without in which one man's sin is laid on another while they themselves profess to believe in a God of love, they consciously or unconsciously caricature the Christian doctrine. For the plain and repeated teaching of Scripture is that it was not an outsider but God Himself in the person of Christ who met the demands of His own justice in order that He might be free to save man. For 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,' II Cor. 5:19. Nor is this doctrine difficult to understand. A little child can understand its essential features, and can receive it to the salvation of his soul. And certainly it is not a system of human invention, for all men naturally feel that they should earn salvation by their own good works. A system of salvation by grace is so radically at variance with what man sees in the natural world where every thing and person is evaluated in terms of works and merits that he has great difficulty in bringing Himself to believe that it can be true. There is real point in the words of the great English preacher, C. H. Spurgeon: 'The doctrine of substitution must be true; it could not have been invented by human wit.' In one way or another all of the pagan religions and all of the philosophical systems teach that man must earn his own salvation. Christianity alone sets forth a system of salvation by grace. Time and again the Scriptures repeat the assertion that salvation is by grace, as if anticipating the difficulty which men would have in coming to the conclusion that they could not earn it by their own good works.

### The Atonement - The Active and Passive Obedience of Christ

We have said that the two great objectives to be accomplished by Christ in His mission to this world are, first, the removal of the curse under which His people labored as a result of the fall, and second, their restoration to the image and fellowship of God. It is perfectly evident that both of these elements were essential to salvation. In the preceding section we pointed out that because of the federal relationship which, through appointment of God, Adam bore to his posterity, all mankind since that time have been born into the state into which he fell, and that the purpose of Christ was to rescue His people from that condition and to bring them into a state of holiness and blessedness. In order that He might accomplish that purpose He entered into a vital relationship with them by taking their nature upon Himself through incarnation. Then, acting as their federal head and representative in precisely the same manner that Adam had acted when he plunged the race into sin, He assumed their place before the divine law fulfilling, on the one hand, its every precept, and on the other, receiving in His own person the penalty due for their transgressions. He thus lived the particular kind of life and suffered the particular kind of death that we read of in the Gospels. These two phases of His work are known as His 'Active' and His 'Passive' obedience.

Throughout the history of the Church most theological discussions have stressed Christ's passive obedience (although not often calling it by that name), but have had very little to say about His active obedience. The result is that many professing Christians who readily acknowledge that Christ suffered and died for them

seem altogether unaware of the fact that the holy, sinless life which He lived was also a vicarious work in their behalf, wrought out by Him in His representative capacity and securing for them title to eternal life.

A moment's reflection should convince us that the suffering and death of Christ, although fully effective in paying the debt which His people owed to divine justice, was in a sense only a negative service. Being of the nature of a penalty it could relieve His people from the liability under which they labored, but it could not provide them with a positive reward. Its effect was to bring them back up to the zero point, back to the position in which Adam stood before the fall. It provided for their rescue from sin and its consequences, but it did not provide for their establishment in heaven. Life in heaven is the reward for the perfect keeping- of the moral law through a probationary period. Had the work of Christ stopped with the mere payment of the debt which was owed by His people, then they, like Adam, would still have been under obligation to have earned their own salvation through a covenant of works and, also like Adam, subject again to eternal death if they disobeyed. But the covenant of works had had its day and had failed. Very evidently if salvation is to be attempted a second time it will be on a different plan. For what would be the sense of rescuing a man from a torrent which had proved too strong for him merely to put him back into the same situation? Having rescued his people once God would not permit them to be lost a second time and in precisely the same way. This time not man but God will be the Actor; not works but grace (which is the free and undeserved love or favor of God exercised toward the undeserving, toward sinners) will be the basis; and not failure but complete success will crown the effort. Hence Christ, in His human nature and as a perfectly normal man among men, rendered perfect obedience to the moral law by living a sinless life during the thirty-three years of His earthly career, and thus fulfilled the second and vitally important part of His work of redemption.

### *The Sinless Life Of Christ*

That Christ did live this life of perfect love and unselfish service to God and man is clearly set forth in Scripture. He 'did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' 1 Peter 2:22. He was 'holy guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners,' says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews. 7 :26. 'I do always the things that are pleasing to Him,' said Jesus, John 8:29. 'Which of you convicteth me of sin?' was His challenge to His enemies, John 8:46. Even the demons bore witness that He was 'the Holy One of God,' Luke 4:34. As He was being crucified He prayed, 'Father, forgive them.' But never did He pray, Father, forgive me. It is not uncommon for the greatest of saints, when they come to the hour of death, to pour out their souls in fresh confessions; desiring to obtain renewed consciousness of sins forgiven. But there is no trace of sin-consciousness to be found anywhere in the life of Jesus. He made no confession of sin, nor did He at any time offer a sacrifice for Himself in the temple. At the time of His death there was no shadow of a cloud between Him and the Father except as He assumed the consequences of sin on behalf of others.

By that life of spotless perfection, then, Jesus acquired for His people a positive righteousness which is imputed to them and which secures for them life in heaven. All that Christ has done and suffered is regarded as having been done and suffered by them. In Him they have fulfilled the law of perfect obedience, as also in Him they have borne the penalty for their sins. By His passive obedience they have been rescued from hell; and by His active obedience they are given entrance into heaven.

### *Salvation By Grace*

Paul's teaching that we are saved, not by a self-acquired, but by an imputed righteousness is very clear and definite. He strongly rebuked those of His own race who, 'being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God,' Rom. 10:3; and he declared that he willingly suffered the loss of all things in order that he might 'gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ,' Phil. 3:9. 'Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,' II Cor. 5:21,-that is, our guilt and punishment was transferred to Christ, in order that His

righteousness and purity might be transferred to us. To the Ephesians he wrote, 'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them,' 2:10. Notice that he does not say that this change in character came about because we did good works, but that he ascribes the workmanship to God and says that its purpose was that we might bear fruit in good works and that these were not original on our part but that they were afore prepared or planned out that we should do them. In his declarations that, 'If there had been a law given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law,' Gal. 3:21, and 'If righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nought,' Gal. 2:21, he disposes completely of the notion that man can earn his own salvation by good works. If we had been able to have worked out our own salvation there would have been no need for Christ to have become incarnate and to have submitted to such humiliation and suffering. And, of course, in that case He most certainly would not have done so. How profoundly grateful we should be that not only our suffering for sin, but also our probation for heaven, has been assumed for us by Christ, that each of these is now a thing of the past, and that we are safe forever in God's care !

The salvation which the Scriptures offer to mankind is therefore a salvation provided entirely by God Himself. It is not adulterated in any way by human works. And because it is of this nature the Scripture writers never tire of asserting that it is by grace and not by works. Even the faith through which salvation is received is induced by the Holy Spirit and is a gift: 'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory,' Eph. 2:8, 9. We are 'justified freely by His grace,' Rom. 3:24. Man's own righteousness, in the words of Isaiah, is as but 'a polluted garment' (or, as the King James Version expresses it, 'as filthy rags') in the sight of God, 64:6. 'Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,' Titus 3:5. To Paul's assertion that Christ is 'all, and in all' in matters of salvation, Col. 3:11, we can add that man is nothing at all as to that work, and has not anything in himself which merits salvation. We are, in fact, nothing but receivers; we never bring any adequate reward to God, and we are always receiving from Him, and shall be unto all eternity. Good works are in no sense the meritorious ground, but rather the fruits and proof of salvation. They are performed not with the purpose of earning salvation, but as an expression of love and gratitude for the salvation which has already been conferred upon us. Good works, done with right motives toward God, are a result of our having been regenerated, not the means of our regeneration. Our part in this system is to praise God, to honor Him by keeping His commandments, and to reflect His glory in all possible ways. And just because salvation is by grace and does not have to be earned by works it is possible even for one who repents on his death bed, or for one like the thief on the cross, to turn to Jesus in the last hour and be saved.

In another connection the present writer has said: 'We hold that the law of perfect obedience which was originally given to Adam was permanent, that God has never done anything which would convey the impression that the law was too rigid in its requirements, or too severe in its penalty, or that it stood in need either of abrogation or of derogation. We believe that the requirement for salvation now as originally is perfect obedience, perfect conformity to the will and character of God, that the merits of Christ's obedience are imputed to His people as the only basis of their salvation, and that they enter heaven clothed only with the cloak of His perfect righteousness and utterly destitute of any merit properly their own. Thus grace, pure grace, is extended not in lowering the requirements for salvation, but in the substitution of Christ for His people. He took their place before the law and did for them what they could not do for themselves. This Calvinistic principle is fitted in every way to impress upon us the absolute perfection and unchangeable obligation of the law which was originally given to Adam. It is not relaxed or set aside, but fittingly honored so that its excellence is shown. In behalf of those who are saved, for whom Christ died, and in behalf of those who are subjected to everlasting punishment, the law in its majesty is enforced and executed.'--The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, p. 154.

This doctrine of the sufficiency of Christ's work in regard both to His active and passive obedience is beautifully set forth in the Westminster Confession, which declares that 'The Lord Jesus, by His perfect

obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; hath purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father had given Him' (Ch. VIII, Sec. 5). And in the Shorter Catechism in answer to the question, 'What is justification?' we are told that 'Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.'

But while it enables us to understand more clearly and fully the work which Christ has accomplished for us, if we view it as having an active and a passive side, we must not imagine that these two phases can be separated in His life. We cannot even say that His active obedience was accomplished by His life and His passive obedience by His death. For in varying degrees these two works were accomplished simultaneously and concurrently. Throughout all of His life He was perfectly obedient to the moral law in all that He thought and said and did. And in varying degrees every moment of His life on earth involved humiliation or suffering or both,—it involved humiliation beyond our power to comprehend for the King of Glory, the Creator of the universe, the One who is altogether holy and blessed and powerful and rich to be born a helpless babe, and that in the most humble condition, to subject Himself to the limitations of incarnate man for a period of thirty-three years, to endure the temptations presented by the Devil, to bring His holy and sensitive nature into close association with sinful men so that He would hear their failings and curses and be confronted with their ingratitude and opposition and hatred, to experience fatigue and hunger, and to look forward through all of His public ministry to the most shameful and painful death by crucifixion. And nowhere else was His active obedience so prominently displayed as on the cross, for there in particular as He suffered He also resisted all temptation to doubt God, or hate His enemies, or commit the slightest offense against those who treated Him so shamefully. Throughout His entire life as He actively obeyed He passively endured, and as He passively endured He actively obeyed. These two aspects of His work, while distinct in nature, were inextricably intertwined in time. Together they secure the wonderful, full salvation which was wrought out vicariously for us.

### *The Crucifixion On Calvary*

Death by crucifixion is, of course, horrible in the extreme. The usual procedure was that the crosspieces would be laid flat on the ground, the person then stretched upon it, and a soldier would drive iron spikes through the hands and feet into the rough wood. Then the cross with its attached victim would be lifted and set in the hole prepared for it. The person was left to writhe in his agony, with the swelling wounds, the parched thirst, the burning fever, until death brought the welcome release. Human ingenuity has never devised greater agony than crucifixion. Yet that is what Christ endured for us.

But not for a minute would we be understood as inferring that we can really fathom the depths of Christ's suffering. We are only given partial information concerning it. His physical suffering was that of a perfectly normal man in crucifixion. Yet that was not all, nor even the most important part, of His suffering. His cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me' indicates a spiritual suffering more intense and more baffling than the physical. We have already seen that the penalty originally inflicted for sin was not merely the separation of the soul from the body, which is physical death, but the separation of the soul from God, which is spiritual death. That Jesus suffered this latter form of the penalty as well as the former is attested by His despairing cry. During those hours that Jesus hung on the cross as the sin-offering for His people that unique spiritual relationship which had existed between His human soul and the Father, and which had so enriched Him during the entire period of His earthly life, was completely withdrawn. No glimpse of Divinity any longer broke in upon Him. God had literally hid His face from Him. His human soul, which in Gethsemane 'began to be greatly amazed and sore troubled,' was now entirely cut off from all divine enlightenment. Being limited in knowledge and comprehension as all human souls are, utterly distressed by the ordeal through which He was passing, and engaged in this last desperate combat with the Devil and the forces of the evil world which through His entire earthly career had sought untiringly to cause His downfall and to defeat His

purpose. His human soul was unable to understand fully this complete abandonment of the righteous soul by God the Father.

Not only was all special grace withdrawn from Him, but also all common grace. No sedative was allowed to dull His pain. Ordinarily those who were sentenced to be crucified were given a stupefying drug, in order that their suffering might be somewhat alleviated. Doubtless the two thieves who were crucified at the same time received that treatment. But Jesus, realizing that such a drug would incapacitate Him for carrying the very burden of suffering for which He had come to that hour and that it would therefore defeat His purpose of redemption, rejected the wine and myrrh and determined to suffer with His senses fully alert. All of His friends forsook Him. Only His enemies remained to taunt. His clothes (also a gift of common grace, clothes being designed since the time of the fall to cover the body and to serve as a restraint on human sin) were removed, leaving Him shamefully exposed to the vulgar rabble. The light, which is one of the greatest gifts of common grace, was denied Him, and for three hours He was left to suffer in the terrifying darkness. Calvary presents a spectacle such as had never been seen before and can never be seen again. For Jesus did not suffer and die passively, as one helplessly submitting to the inevitable, but actively, as one keeping a schedule or as one fulfilling a purpose. Had we been able to have looked within the soul of Christ we would have witnessed the most colossal struggle that the universe has ever known. Far from being the passive sufferer that He appeared to those who witnessed the crucifixion, He was upholding the pillars of the moral universe by rendering full satisfaction to divine justice. For as the sinner's substitute and in his stead Jesus stood before the awful tribunal of God,--before the Judge who abhors sin and burns against it with inexpressible indignation. Justice severe and inexorable was meted out. As He endured the break in the spiritual relationship with the Father He literally descended into hell; for hell is primarily separation from God, a condition the exact opposite of the blessed environment of the divine presence. This does not mean that His soul suffered remorse or any sense of guilt, which is one of the torments of lost souls; for He had no personal sin. Nor does it mean that this condition continued after His death. All was completed on the cross. When the allotted suffering was finished the divine light again broke in upon His soul, and we hear His triumphant cry, 'It is finished' (that is, the atonement, God's objective provision for man's salvation, was completed); and that was followed almost immediately by the affectionate words, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Every detail of the account is so presented that we are compelled to recognize the full price of our redemption was paid for by Christ alone, without human assistance of any kind. And thus through the infinite mercy of God and in a manner that shall forever bring glory to His name there was made available a way, the only possible way, through which sinners might be saved.

And after all, does not this Christian doctrine of the atonement stand forth as the only reasonable and logical explanation of the suffering and death of Christ? God has so ordered this world that sin and suffering are inseparably connected. Where there is no sin God cannot under any conditions inflict suffering,--for the simple reason that it would be unjust for Him to punish an innocent person. Christ's suffering can have no other explanation than that it was vicarious, rendered not for Himself but for others. For there One who was sinless and undefiled suffered the extreme of pain and agony and disgrace as though He were the worst of sinners. Unless Christ was acting on behalf of others and as their substitute, God Himself is put under eternal indictment for inflicting such suffering without a cause.

Moreover, if it be denied that Christ's suffering was vicarious and substitutionary, His voluntary acceptance of crucifixion is utterly unreasonable,--in fact it is scandalous, because suicidal. The plain teaching of Scripture is that He accepted this ordeal voluntarily. 'I lay down my life for the sheep ... No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself,' John 10:15, 18. Rebuking Peter for His well-intended but misguided use of the sword He said, 'Put up the sword into the sheath: the cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' John 18.11. Now it is perfectly evident, of course, that no creature, not even a sinless angel, has the right to dispose of his own life. That prerogative belongs only to the Creator to whom he belongs. But Christ did have that right, because He was the King of the universe. Since He had within Himself divine as well as human life He could dispose of Himself without fatal or permanent injury either to Himself or to any

other person. When seen in the light of the doctrines of substitution, satisfaction, sacrifice, the death of Christ appears as a great divine achievement, a glorious and unapproachable priestly action through which the suffering Messiah offered Himself in order that divine justice might be safeguarded and that sinful man might be reconciled to God. Logic drives us to the conclusion that the death of Christ on the cross was no ordinary death, but a mighty transaction through which God provided redemption for His people.

Unless Christ was what He claimed to be, Deity incarnate giving His life a ransom for many, the Unitarians and modernists are right in saying that the doctrine of the Atonement is a colossal hoax and that it is ridiculous for anyone to believe that he can obtain salvation through faith in a mere man, a Jew, who was crucified in Palestine nineteen hundred years ago. Either the Christian system is true and we are saved through the supernatural work of Christ as the Bible teaches and as devout people in all ages have believed, or we are left to save ourselves through some humanistic or naturalistic system as skeptics and unbelievers have held.

On the basis of any teaching rightfully calling itself Christian the active and passive obedience of Christ emerges as the only basis of our spiritual and eternal life. Since the demand that sin must be punished was met by Him in His representative capacity, justice was not injured; and since His life of perfect obedience to the moral law was also rendered in His representative capacity, the gift of spiritual cleansing and of eternal life is now conferred upon His people as their right and privilege. He saves them from hell, and establishes them in heaven. There is no blessing in this world or in the next for which they should not give Christ thanks.

### The Atonement - Christ As Our Ransomer

In numerous places in Scripture Christ's work of redemption is declared to have been accomplished through the payment of a ransom. Nowhere is this set forth more clearly than in our Lord's own teaching. 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many,' said He concerning His own mission. Matt. 20:28. These same words are repeated in Mark 10:45. Paul doubtless had these words in mind when he declared that Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for all,' I Tim. 2:6. To the Corinthians he wrote, 'Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price,' I Cor. 6:19, 20. The elders from the church at Ephesus were admonished to 'feed the church of the Lord which He purchased with His own blood.' Acts 20:28. 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us,' he wrote to the Galatians, 3:13. In the epistle to Titus he declares that Christ 'gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works,' 2:14. While it is the privilege of a disciple to 'lose' his life in the service of his Lord (Matt. 10:39; Luke 9:24), it was the part of the Lord to 'give' His life voluntarily for His people (John 10:15; Gal. 2:20).

Closely parallel with this is Peter's teaching: 'Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from the fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ,' I Peter 1:18, 19. In his second epistle he warns against those who 'bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them,' 2:1. And in the book of Revelation praise is ascribed to Christ in the words, 'Thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,' 5:9.

To 'ransom' means specifically to buy back, to deliver by means of purchase; and the kindred expression, to 'redeem,' means to deliver by payment of a ransom. We are taught that Christ is our Ransomer, and that He has purchased our redemption at a tremendous cost, the price being His own life. The one pre-eminent service which Jesus came into the world to perform was that of dying--giving His life a ransom in behalf of others who themselves deserved to die, in order that they might not have to die. No person can understand the purpose and meaning of the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ until he grasps this central truth, that Jesus came into the world to give Himself a ransom for others. The numerous Scripture references to redemption or to the payment of a ransom invariably imply that redemption has cost something, indeed, that

it has cost much. The inability of man to redeem himself or any other man turns precisely on his inability to pay the price which the commission of sin has made mandatory. Christ, and Christ alone, was able to pay the price which would free His people from the curse of sin.

The meaning of the ransom terminology as used in Scripture is set forth by Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield in the following paragraph: 'Lutron, usually in the plural lutra, designates an indemnification, a pecuniary compensation, given in exchange for a cessation of rights over a person or even a thing, ransom. It is used for the money given to redeem a field, Lev. 25:24--the life of an ox about to be killed, Ex. 21:30--one's own life in arrest of judicial proceedings, Num. 35:31, 32, or of vengeance, Prov. 6:35--the first born over whom God had claims, Num. 3:46, 48, 51; 18:15, etc. It is ordinarily used of the ransom given for redemption from captivity or slavery, Lev. 19:20; Is. 45:13, etc.' (Biblical Doctrines, p. 342).

A present day English writer has set forth the implications of the term very clearly in these words: 'I do not merely decide that Christ shall be my Lord. He is my Lord, by right. I was a slave of sin and Satan, and, try as I would, I could not obtain my freedom. I was never a free man, I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity.' A slave! And there would I be now, were it not that Christ came and 'bought me with a price.' What follows 'Ye are not your own.' I am still not free! I have been bought by a new Master! I am a slave, the bond-servant of Christ! He is my Lord, for He has bought me. He does not merely 'demand my soul, my life, my all;' He has bought them, they are His. I am His, because He is my Lord, because He owns me, because He has bought me with His own precious blood,'--Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones.

### *Those Ransomed Must Be Set Free*

A ransom, because of its very nature, makes not merely possible but mandatory and certain the release of those for whom it is paid. Justice demands that those for whom it is paid shall be freed from any further obligation. God would be unjust if He demanded the penalty twice over, first from the Substitute and then from the persons themselves. Because of what Christ has done for His people, and because of the covenant that exists between Him and the Father, all of those for whom the ransom was paid must be brought to salvation. Salvation is thus not of works, not through any good deeds done by men, but purely of grace. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,' I John 1:9--faithful in keeping His promise that if we turn to Him we shall find forgiveness, and righteous in keeping His covenant with Christ who suffered vicariously for His people and purchased for them the regenerating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. Those who have been given to Christ by the Father invariably receive these influences and are effectively brought to salvation. Under no conditions can they be called upon to pay the debt a second time, nor can these saving influences be withheld from them, and that specifically for the reason that salvation is by the grace of God and not by the works of men. 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?' Rom. 8:33, 34. 'He that believeth hath eternal life,' John 6:47. As God's elect we have the assurance that 'neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord,' Rom. 8:38, 39.

### *The Atonement - The Representative Principle*

We have said that at the beginning of the race Adam stood not only for himself but as the federal head and representative of the entire human race which was to follow, and that Christ in His turn in both His active and passive obedience stood for all of those who were to be saved. This representative principle pervades all Scripture, and is the basis for the doctrine of original sin and for the doctrine of redemption. It was, in fact, only because the race as originally created was so constituted that one person could stand as its official and responsible head that Christ, coming at a later time and basing His work on the same principle, could redeem His people. It is as if God had said, If sin is to enter, let it enter by one man, so that righteousness also may

enter by one man.

The Scriptures teach that the race is a unit, a family, descended from a common ancestor, and bound together by blood ties. This is in contrast with the order followed in the creation of the angels, for they were created not as a race but independently of each other and all at the same time. Each angel stood his test personally and individually.

In virtue of the vital unity of the human race it was possible for God at the very beginning to enter into a 'covenant of works' with the ancestor of the race, in which he, bearing their nature and acting therefore in precisely the same way they would have acted, stood trial for them. This afforded a wonderful opportunity for Adam to secure for himself and for his posterity an inestimable--we may even say, an infinite--blessing. For it was so arranged that if he stood his probation and rendered the perfect obedience which was required (and thereby proved himself a grateful, law-abiding son who could be trusted), eternal life would have been conferred upon him and them. But if he did not stand his probation, but committed sin, the penalty of eternal death would be inflicted not only upon him but equally upon all of his descendants. That covenant involved the most solemn responsibilities. It was freighted with possibilities for infinite good or evil.

As originally created, man was perfect of his kind, possessing a positive inclination toward virtue, yet fallible. He was perfect as the bud is perfect and capable of developing into the flower, or as the acorn is perfect and capable of developing into the oak tree. He was not created as a machine or automaton, but as a free moral agent who might choose evil and plunge himself and everything connected with him into disaster. It is apparently true, as Dr. Fairbairn has said, that 'Moral perfection can be attained, but cannot be created; God can make a being capable of moral action, but not a being with all the fruits of moral action garnered within him.' Had Adam chosen good, then, by that very action he would have produced moral goodness, and God would have confirmed him (that is, made permanent his character) in that goodness as He has confirmed the holy angels in heaven in their goodness.

In language which is at once childlike and profound the third chapter of Genesis tells us of the fall of the human race. Man had his most fair and favorable chance there in the Garden of Eden; and with his eyes open and in spite of the dearest warning as to what the consequences would be, he chose evil instead of good. The Scriptures assert, and the experience of the race from that hour to this bears witness to the truth of the assertion, that Adam fell and that all of his descendants are born into that same state of moral depravity into which he fell. But they also teach that because of the organic unity of the race it was possible for Christ to enter into a 'Covenant of Redemption' with God the Father whereby He should act for His people in precisely the same capacity as Adam had acted for the race, providing, on the one hand, that the penalty for their sin should be laid on Him, and on the other, that the merits of His sinless life and of His suffering should be set to their account.

That the fall of Adam did involve the fall and ruin of the entire human race, and that by a parallel arrangement the righteousness of Christ is similarly imputed to His people, is made clear by the Apostle Paul when he 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....Death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a figure of Him that was to come. . . . If by the trespass of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift of the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound unto the many.... for if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life as through the one, even Jesus Christ. So then 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,' Rom. 5:12-19. And again, 'For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive,' I Cor. 15:22. (The meaning here, as the context makes clear, is that as all descended from Adam partake of his

sin and die, so also all who by faith are 'in Christ' shall be made alive. In the writings of Paul to be 'in Christ' means to be vitally connected with Him, to be saved. He repeatedly declares that those who are 'in Christ' have been made alive spiritually, Those who are not 'in Christ' are still spiritually dead).

In Christian theology there are three separate and distinct acts of imputation. In the first place Adam's sin is imputed to all of us, his children, that is, judicially set to our account so that we are held responsible for it and suffer the consequences of it. This is commonly known as the doctrine of Original Sin. In the second place, and in precisely the same manner, our sin is imputed to Christ so that He suffers the consequences of it. And in the third place Christ's righteousness is imputed to us and secures for us entrance into heaven. We are, of course, no more personally guilty of Adam's sin than Christ is personally guilty of ours, or than we are personally meritorious because of His righteousness. In each case it is a judicial transaction. We receive salvation from Christ in precisely the same way that we receive condemnation and ruin from Adam. In each case the result follows because of the close and official union which exists between the persons involved. To reject any one of these three steps is to reject an essential part of the Christian system.

But while on the basis of the unity of the human race it was possible for man to be redeemed through the work of a substitute, redemption by such means does not seem to have been possible among the fallen angels. We read of 'angels that kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation,' and are now 'kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day,' Jude 6. And the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, after saying that Christ became incarnate in order that He might perform His redemptive work, adds: 'For verily not to angels doth He give help, but He giveth help to the seed of Abraham,' 2:16. Since each angel stood his test individually, he is therefore personally and solely responsible for his own condition. But mankind which fell through the act of a representative without personal guilt can be redeemed through the act of a representative without personal merit.

The representative principle is certainly not foreign to our way of life, nor is it difficult to understand. The people of a state act in and through their representatives in the Legislature. If a country has a good president or king, all of the people share the benefits; if a bad president or king, all suffer the consequences. Children are recognized as the rightful and legal heirs of their parents' wealth and good name, and to a considerable extent inherit even their mental and physical characteristics. In a very real sense parents stand representative for, and to a large extent decide the destinies of, their children. If the parents are virtuous, wise and thrifty, the children reap the blessings; if they are immoral, foolish and indolent, the children suffer. In law we have 'power of attorney,' and the person for whom the attorney acts assumes full legal responsibility for his acts, whether they are beneficial or injurious. In business we have trusteeship. In a thousand ways the well-being of individuals is conditioned by the acts of others, so inwrought is this representative principle in our every day life.

In the following section Dr. Charles Hodge, one of the ablest theologians that America has produced, has given a very clear exposition of this subject: 'This representative principle pervades the whole Scriptures. The imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity is not an isolated fact. It is only an illustration of a general principle which characterizes the dispensations of God from the beginning of the world. God declares Himself to Moses as one who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation, Ex. 34:6, 7 ... The curse pronounced on Canaan fell on his posterity. Esau's selling his birthright shut out his descendants from the covenant of promise. The children of Moab and Ammon were excluded from the congregation of the Lord forever, because their ancestors opposed the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. In the case of Dathan and Abram, as in that of Achan, their wives, and their sons, and their little children perished for the sins of their parents. God said to Eli that the iniquity of his house should not be purged with sacrifice and offering for ever. To David it was said, The sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.' To the disobedient Gehazi it was said: 'The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed forever.' The sin of Jeroboam and of the men of his generation determined the

destiny of the ten tribes for all time. The imprecation of the Jews, when they demanded the crucifixion of Christ, 'His blood be on us and on our children,' still weighs down the scattered people of Israel... This principle runs through the whole Scriptures. When God entered into covenant with Abraham, it was not for himself only but for his posterity. They were bound by all the stipulations of the covenant. They shared its promises and its threatenings, and in hundreds of cases the penalty for disobedience came upon those who had no personal part in the transgressions. Children suffered equally with adults in the judgments, whether famine, pestilence, or war, which came upon the people for their sins.. .. And the Jews to this day are suffering the penalty of the sins of their fathers for their rejection of Him of whom Moses and the prophets spoke. The whole plan of redemption rests on this same principle. Christ is the representative of His people, and on this ground their sins are imputed to Him and His righteousness to them. No man who believes the Bible, can shut his eyes to the fact that it everywhere recognizes the representative character of parents, and that the dispensations of God have from the beginning been founded on the principle that the children bear the iniquities of their fathers. This is one of the reasons which infidels assign for rejecting the divine origin of the Scriptures. But infidelity furnishes no relief. History is as full of this doctrine as the Bible is. The punishment of the felon involves his family in his disgrace and misery. The spendthrift and drunkard entail poverty and wretchedness upon all connected with them. There is no nation now existing on the face of the earth, whose condition for weal or woe is not largely determined by the character and conduct of their ancestors. The idea of the transfer of guilt or of vicarious punishment lies at the foundation of the expiatory offerings under the Old Testament, and of the great atonement under the new dispensation. To bear sin is, in Scriptural language, to bear the penalty of sin. The victim bore the sin of the offerer. Hands were imposed upon the head of the animal about to be slaughtered, to express the transfer of guilt. That animal must be free from all defect or blemish to make it the more apparent that its blood was shed not for its own deficiencies but for the sin of another. All this was symbolical and typical ... And this is what the Scriptures teach concerning the atonement of Christ. He bore our sins; He was a curse for us; He suffered the penalty of the law in our stead. All this proceeds on the ground that the sins of one man can be justly, on some adequate ground, imputed to another.' '--Systematic Theology, ii, pp. 198-201.

Strange as it may seem, there are many professing Christians in our day who, while readily acknowledging that our salvation comes from Christ, deny that we inherit any guilt and corruption from Adam. Such a position is, of course, utterly inconsistent, and can have no other effect than to undermine true Christianity. If we accept the doctrine of salvation through Christ we have no right to deny the supplementary and equally Scriptural doctrine of condemnation and ruin through Adam. Unless we are fallen in Adam there is, in fact, no reason why we should be redeemed through Christ. The federal headship of Christ in the covenant of redemption presupposes the federal headship of Adam in the covenant of works. The latter is the necessary basis for the former, and the work and position of Christ in relation to His people can be understood only when it is seen in its true relation to the work of Adam. The Scriptures teach that the principles upon which sin and misery came upon the race through Adam are identical with those upon which righteousness and blessedness come upon the elect through Christ. False views concerning our relation to Adam and the effect that his work has had upon the entire race must inevitably produce false views concerning our relation to Christ and His work of redemption. These two doctrines are strictly parallel, and must stand or fall together. They cannot be separated without destroying the logical consistency of the Christian system.

END

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