

ARTICLE IV.

ATONEMENT.

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THE word *atonement* occurs but once in our English New Testament, and is the translation of a Greek word (*καταλλαγῆναι*) which, in every other instance, is rendered *reconciliation*. An atonement therefore, in the sense of our translators, is a reconciliation. But the word has undergone a slight change of meaning, within the last two hundred years. As now used, it denotes, not so much a reconciliation, as that which is done to *open and prepare the way* for a reconciliation. As used by evangelical Christians, it refers to what has been done by our Lord Jesus Christ, to *open a way* for the recovery and salvation of sinful men, that so a reconciliation may be effected between them and their Maker.

There were atonements under the former dispensation; but these were merely of a typical character. The blood of beasts was designed to prefigure, to shadow forth, the great atonement which, in the fulness of time, was to be made by the blood of Christ upon the cross. We shall have no occasion to refer to these typical atonements, except as they serve to throw light upon the important doctrine now before us.

It may be proper to say, in passing, that the word *atonement* is seldom used by the older Protestant theologians, except in reference to the typical atonements of the Old Testament. It does not occur, we think, in any of the confessions or catechisms of the Reformed churches, and probably not in any of the theological writings of the seventeenth century. Not even President Edwards, or Dr. Hopkins has aught to say of the *atonement* of Christ, under that specific name. They have much to say of his work of *redemption*, and what is now called the *atonement* is merged in that.

The separating of the atonement from the more general doctrine of redemption, has tended much to simplify the sub-

ject, and so has been a real gain to theology. The atonement of Christ is a specific work; it relates to what he did and suffered to *open a way* for the salvation of sinners. Redemption is a more general work, including all that Christ has ever done, or will do, in promoting and securing the salvation of his people. The atonement is universal, as to its sufficiency. Redemption, in the full sense of the term, applies only to the elect. The work of atonement was finished, when Christ bowed his head and gave up the ghost. The work of redemption is not yet finished, nor will it be, until all the elect are gathered in.

In entering upon the discussion before us, our first inquiry is as to *the necessity* of an atonement. There are those who doubt this necessity. The sinner ought to come to a knowledge of his sins, and when he sees them, he ought to repent of them. He is able and is justly required to repent; and when he does repent he may be forgiven and saved. There is nothing in the way of his salvation, but his impenitence, and this difficulty he is well able to overcome. Or, if he is not able of himself to come to repentance, God surely can bring him to repentance, without first resorting to the strange expedient of offering up his own Son upon the cross.

But if the death of Christ was not needed to make an atonement for sin, it is hard to see why he should have died at all. It is agreed by all, that Christ was a perfectly holy being; of course, he could not have died for his own sins. It is agreed, too, that his death took place in the providence of God. And how are we to account for such a dispensation; how vindicate the propriety or justice of it, but upon the supposition of a needed atonement? If Christ's death was necessary to make an atonement for sin, and if, in view of such necessity, he was willing to die; then there is no difficulty. The reasons of the transaction, and the justice of it, so far as the hand of God was concerned in it, are clear; but on any other supposition, we know not what to think of such an event, or how to account for it, in consistency with the rectitude of providence. That God should bring an in-

nocent man to the cross, when he had done nothing to deserve such an infliction, and had not consented to it; bring him there, like any other victim, in spite of himself, and without any indispensable necessity, either on his own account, or that of others; how are we to justify such a transaction? Who can believe it? If it is hard to conceive (as some tell us) why the just should be suffered, with his own consent, to die for the unjust; is it not vastly more difficult to see why he should be made, or suffered, to die for nothing, neither for his own sins, nor for those of the world?

The necessity of an atonement by the death of Christ is plainly and abundantly taught in the Scriptures. Our Saviour himself taught this doctrine. "The Son of man *must* suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8: 31). "The Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24: 7). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 14). "Thus it is written, and thus it *behooved* Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day" (Luke 24: 47). Paul reasoned with the Thessalonians out of the Scriptures, "opening and alleging that *Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead*" (Acts 17: 3).

Perhaps it will be said, that the necessity indicated in these passages results only from the fact, that Christ's sufferings and death had been predetermined and predicted, and the prediction must be fulfilled. But this, if it be admitted, only places the argument one step further back. For if there was no *inherent necessity* for Christ's sufferings and death, why were they predetermined? Why predicted? Why did it enter into the eternal purpose of God, that thus it should be?

The necessity of Christ's sufferings as a satisfaction for sin is clearly indicated in what took place in the garden of Gethsemane: "O my Father, if it *be possible*, let this cup pass from me!" "Abba, Father, all things are possible with

thee ; take away this cup from me." And why was not the cup of suffering taken away? Why was not such a thing possible? Let those who think an atonement unnecessary answer these questions, if they can.

The necessity of an atonement in order to forgiveness is further taught in the *typical atonements* of the Old Testament. The sacrifice of the victim, in those days, was never intended as a *means* of repentance, or a *substitute* for it. It rather implied and *required* repentance. The offerer must be already penitent, else his sacrifice would not be accepted. Why then, on the ground we oppose, was the sacrifice enjoined at all? The offerer is already penitent, and penitence, we are told, is enough. Why, then, must the innocent lamb be slain, and his blood be sprinkled upon the mercy seat? Is not here conclusive proof, that mere penitence is not enough; that an expiation is demanded, that something must be done to satisfy the law and the justice of God; or not even the penitent sinner can be pardoned and saved?

We have further evidence of the same truth, in that *faith* is made one of the indispensable conditions of salvation. Repentance is, indeed, an indispensable condition. We must repent, in order to be forgiven. Except we repent, we all perish. And if mere repentance was enough, this ought to be the only condition. But there is also the indispensable condition of *faith*; faith in Christ; faith in a *crucified Redeemer*. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever *believeth* on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now this requisition of faith shows conclusively, that repentance alone is *not* a sufficient ground of pardon. The Son of man must be lifted up. He must bleed and die upon the cross. And he must be accepted, trusted in, *believed in*, as an atoning sacrifice, or there is no salvation for us.

Those who flatter themselves that repentance alone is sufficient to satisfy God's justice, as a moral governor, would do well to apply their theory to another kind of justice; viz., *commutative or commercial* justice, that which regulates the

dealings of man with man. A honestly owes B a sum of money, and justice requires that it should be paid. But A is very sorry that he has got into B's debt. He humbles and blames himself, and heartily repents for so doing. But do his repentings cancel the claims of justice against him, or furnish any sufficient grounds for his being released from his obligations? That would be a summary way of clearing off old debts, for the creditor to release the debtor from his obligations, so soon as he was sorry that he had contracted them. Every one can see that such a principle could not be tolerated in application to commercial justice; and why should it operate any more favorably, when applied to governmental justice? The claims of the latter are not less stringent and inviolable, certainly, than those of the former; and if the principle would work nothing but confusion in the former case, going to dissolve all the bands of commercial intercourse, how can it be shown that it would not work as disastrously, and even more so, in the latter?

The necessity of an atonement is often felt, *deeply, painfully*, under human governments. It was felt by king Darius, when "he set his heart on Daniel to deliver him" from the lion's den, "and labored till the going-down of the sun to deliver him," but could not. Could Darius have hit upon some expedient, by which his law and government would be as much honored in delivering Daniel, as in punishing him; in other words, could he have devised and provided a sufficient atonement for Daniel, he might safely have delivered him. But as this was found to be impossible, nought remained but that Daniel must go into the den of lions.

The same necessity was felt by the elder Brutus, when his sons had conspired against the Roman commonwealth. Could a sufficient atonement have been made for them, they might have been spared; but as none could be devised, the father was obliged to pass sentence of death upon them, and to stand by and see it executed.

The necessity of an atonement is continually and sometimes painfully felt, in smaller governments. A child in a family, or a scholar in school, transgresses some established

law, and is exposed to punishment. The father or master does not wish to punish, and he sets himself to devise some way, some expedient, by which his authority can be maintained, and the infliction be spared. If any such method can be devised, it is of the nature of an atonement. But if none is possible, the infliction must follow, or the authority of the parent or master is weakened, and may be subverted.

We have borrowed these illustrations for the purpose of showing and impressing the necessity of an atonement, if sinners are to be saved under the government of God. But perhaps the strongest argument, after all, for such necessity, grows out of the *fact* of an atonement, as certified to us in the Scriptures. The Bible does teach, in a great variety of forms, and in the plainest terms, that Christ's death upon the cross was of an *expiatory character*; that he died to make an atonement for sin. Thus he is said to have been "wounded for our transgressions," and "bruised for our iniquities." He is said to have "borne our sins;" to have "purged our sins;" to have "suffered for our sins;" to have "died for our sins;" and to have "shed his blood for the remission of sins." He is said to have "redeemed us to God by his blood;" and to have "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us." He "laid down his life for us." He "gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God." He "gave his life a ransom for many." He was "delivered for our offences." "He tasted death for every man." "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." There is no end to representations such as these, taken from all parts of the Bible, and teaching as plainly as words can teach anything, that the death of Christ was an offering, an expiation, an atonement for the sins of men. They teach the *fact* of an atonement, and, by necessary consequence, the *necessity* of it; for, surely, if it had not been necessary, it never had been made. God would not have sent his Son into the world, to take upon himself our nature, and die in our stead, had there been no need of such a sacrifice. He would never

have been at the expense of providing such an atonement, without a most urgent, indispensable necessity.

But if an atonement for sin was necessary, *why* was it necessary? *Why* must the Son of God come down and die, to open a way for the salvation of sinful men? Though these questions have been answered, in part, in the remarks already made, still it may be necessary to give them a more particular consideration. And we answer:

1. An atonement was necessary in order that sinners might *be humbled and brought to repentance*. It is often insisted, as before remarked, that mere repentance is enough to ensure forgiveness, without an atonement. But, without an atonement, who ever had repented? How much true repentance had been found among men? It is in consequence of the atonement that the Holy Spirit is given, without whose influences no human being had ever given his heart to God. It is in consequence of the atonement, that we are favored with the day and the means of grace.

We do not deny the natural ability of sinful men to repent, or (which is the same) that they *can* repent if they will. But *will* they repent, without an atonement? *Have* they? *Where* have they? The devils have natural ability to repent, and are under obligations to repent; but they never did, and they never will. And no more would one of the human race ever have repented, had not an atonement been made for us on the cross.

We would not say that no sinner of our race ever came to repentance, without a *knowledge* of the atonement; though such instances, especially of adult sinners, it is believed, are very rare. It is the preaching of the cross, emphatically, which results in the conversion of souls. It is at the foot of the cross, ordinarily, that the tear of penitence begins to flow. But we do insist and repeat, that, had no atonement been provided, not a soul of our race had ever been brought to repentance. There had been no more true repentance among men on the earth, than there is among the damned in the other world.

But this necessity for the atonement is not, after all, the

most urgent and fundamental. There is a necessity greater than this. We remark, therefore,

2. The atonement of Christ was necessary, to *sustain and honor the broken law of God, to vindicate his authority, and satisfy his glorious justice*. In carrying into effect his eternal purposes, God has undertaken to be, not only the universal Creator and Disposer, but a *moral Governor*. He has surrounded himself with intelligent creatures, free, moral, responsible agents, proper subjects of law and government; and he has undertaken to administer a moral government over them. He has undertaken to govern them, not by physical force, but by laws, motives, and moral considerations; by a system of just rewards and punishments. But in order to the success of this vast undertaking, it is obviously necessary for the Supreme Ruler, as it is for any other ruler, to *sustain law*. He must not suffer his law to be trifled with and trampled on. He must maintain it inviolate, in all its strictness and strength, its authority and purity, or his government of law will be subverted and overthrown.

And here lies the necessity of an adequate atonement, if transgressors of the divine law are to be forgiven and saved. The law can be sustained, by punishing the transgressors as they deserve; by inflicting upon them the threatened penalty. Can it be as fully sustained in any other way? Can any expedient be devised, by which the broken law can be honored, and God's righteous regard for it be displayed, and all the ends of government be secured, as fully, as perfectly, as they would be by inflicting the penalty? Such an expedient (if such an one be possible) would be an atonement, a full and adequate atonement. After such an atonement, God could forgive and save sinners, on such conditions as he was pleased to appoint, and yet not detract one iota from his law. His law would stand as inviolate, and his government as strong, as though the threatened penalty had been executed.

But, without some such expedient, or, in other words, without a sufficient atonement, to pardon and save sinners would be a moral impossibility. It could never be tolerated

under the government of God. It could not consist with the stability and perfection of that government, or even with its continued existence.

At the hazard of repetition, we wish to press this point, and to give it prominence, *the necessity of an atonement to honor and sustain law*. God's law has been transgressed here on earth, flagrantly transgressed. A whole world of sinners have cast off the authority of their Sovereign, and risen up in arms against him. God does not wish to punish them, or one of them. He has no pleasure in their death. But what can he do? His law must be honored. His holy government must be sustained, or be given up. It *can* be sustained by the infliction of the penalty on all those who have transgressed. Can it be in any other way? Is any substitute for this terrible infliction possible? Can any sufficient atonement be made? If an atonement *can* be made, then God may consistently pardon and save sinners. But if not, they must all suffer, or God's law and government must suffer. They must be punished as they deserve, or his holy government must be undermined and subverted.

It is our happiness to know, that, in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, an expedient of salvation has been devised. An atonement for sinners has been made. It was made in the sufferings and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we deserved to die, he died for us. He bore our sins *in* his own body on the tree. Christ did not come into our world, and die here for nothing. He did not die for a trifle. He would not take upon himself our nature and flesh, and endure all the agonies of the garden and the cross, without a most urgent necessity. We have seen that there *was* such a necessity for his death, and the grounds or reasons for that necessity we have pretty fully investigated.

Our next inquiry will relate to the *nature* and *efficacy* of Christ's atonement. In what did it consist? And how does it avail for our redemption?

1. In what *did* the atonement of Christ consist? Did it consist in his *perfect holiness*, his *perfect obedience to the divine law*? Or in his *sufferings and death*? Or in both?

As the sufferings and death of Christ were *voluntarily* submitted to, they may be regarded as constituting a species of *obedience*; and so they were regarded in the Scriptures. He was "obedient *unto death*" (Phil. 2: 8). But this, which is sometimes called Christ's *passive* obedience, is not that about which we now inquire. Christ's "obedience unto death" is the same as his voluntary sufferings and death. But the obedience which has been thought by some to enter into the nature of the atonement, and to constitute a part or the whole of it, is his *personal obedience to the divine law*; or, in other words, his *personal holiness*.

We are disposed to attach a high importance to the perfect, spotless holiness of the Saviour. It was indispensable to the work of atonement. It was that without which he could have made no atonement. He *must* be perfectly sinless himself, or he could not make an acceptable offering for the sins of others. "For such a high-priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners; who needeth not daily," like the priests in Israel, "to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people" (Heb. 7: 26). Here, the necessity of the spotless holiness of the Saviour, in order that he might perform the work of atonement, is clearly set forth. Still, in strictness of speech, it can hardly be said that the atonement of Christ consisted at all in his personal obedience, or holiness.

In the first place, Christ's obedience could not meet the chief *necessity* of an atonement, as before explained. That which is needed, is something to sustain law; something to stand in place of the threatened penalty of the law; something which will answer all the purposes of moral government *as well* as the execution of the penalty. An expedient of this nature would be an atonement. Anything short of it would not be. Now it is obvious that the perfect holiness of Christ was no substitute for the penalty threatened to transgressors. It was not adapted to be. It could not be. There was need here of suffering. The penalty of the law consists in suffering, and an equivalent, a substitute, must be of the same nature.

A like view of the subject is presented in the typical atonements of the Old Testament. These all prefigured the atonement of Christ, and may be supposed, so far as they go, to prefigure it accurately. Now it was indispensable to the acceptableness of an offering under the law, that the animal offered should be perfect in its kind. It must be *without spot or blemish*; thus indicating the necessity of the spotless character of Christ. Accordingly, our Saviour is spoken of by Peter as "a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1: 19). Still, the typical atonement did not consist in the spotlessness of the lamb, but in *the shedding of its blood*. It was the blood, emphatically, that made the atonement. So the atonement of Christ, prefigured by that of the law, must consist in the shedding of his blood.

We have the same view presented in *the plain language of Scripture*. The utmost stress is laid, everywhere, upon the *cross, the blood, the death* of Christ, as that in which the expiation, the atonement, properly consists. We hardly need quote passages, after those which have been before given. Christ is said to have been a sacrifice, an offering, an oblation, a propitiation for sin. He is said to have suffered for our sins, to have died for our sins, to have been delivered for our offences, and to have been a curse for us, in his crucifixion. The strongest expressions are used, in different parts of the Bible, to set forth the nature of Christ's atonement, as consisting in his sufferings and death.

And while so great stress is laid on the death of Christ, we find his obedience spoken of in only a few instances; and in most of these, if not all (as the connection shows), the reference is to what has been called his *passive* obedience, or his obedience unto death. "Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became *obedient unto death*" (Phil. 2: 8). "Yet learned he obedience by the things that *he suffered*" (Heb. 5: 8). "By the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5: 19). These are the only passages, perhaps, in which the obedience of Christ is directly spoken of in the Bible. The first two refer, certainly, to his obedience *in suffering*; and, by the most judicious commen-

tators, the last passage quoted is interpreted in the same way.

But it will be said, although we do not find much in the Bible on the subject of Christ's obedience, very much is said respecting his *righteousness*, which amounts to the same thing. "This is the name wherewith he shall be called, The Lord *our righteousness*" (Jer. 23: 6). It is admitted that, in the matter of justification, much stress is laid, in the Scriptures, on *the righteousness of Christ*; but we do not admit that this is the same as his personal *obedience*, or *holiness*. The original words translated "obedience" and "righteousness," are not the same, and not synonymous; neither is this true of the English words. Obedience to the law is the same as virtue or holiness in the general; while righteousness, in its original and proper signification, is *justice, equity, honesty, rectitude, right*. "He shall judge the world with *righteousness*, and the people with his truth" (Ps. 96: 13). "With *righteousness* shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth." "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and *righteousness* to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuges of lies" (Isa. 11: 4. 28: 17). A principal source of error in regard to this subject has been the confounding of the terms obedience and righteousness, regarding them as of the same import, when they are not. Christ is not called, by the prophet, "Jehovah our *obedience*," but "Jehovah our *righteousness*; that is, Jehovah through whom we are *justified*; without shutting us up to the notion of justification by the imputed obedience of the Saviour.

But it will be said, again, unless we consider the obedience of Christ as entering into the nature of the atonement, his atonement cannot be a full ground of justification. Justification involves, not merely a remission of the incurred penalty of the law, which is the same as forgiveness, but also a *restoration to forfeited favor and happiness*. And, although the mere sufferings of Christ may be a sufficient ground of the former, they are not so of the latter. We need the imputed *obedience* and *merits* of Christ to lay a foundation for our being restored; and hence his obedience must

be regarded as constituting an essential part of the atonement.

This is not the place to go into a consideration of objections to the doctrine of justification by the imputed obedience and merits of Christ. We pass these over entirely; and would simply say, that the principal ground of difficulty on the subject seems to us to lie, in not rightly conceiving of *the penalty of God's law*. This penalty in its fullest extent, is both *privative* and *positive*. It involves the loss of God's favor, and the incurring of his displeasure; the loss of the rest and happiness of heaven, and the endurance of eternal miseries in hell. Such is the full penalty of the law of God, for the removal of which the atonement of Christ furnishes the sufficient and only foundation. In procuring the salvation of those who embrace it, it removes the *positive* part of the penalty, so that they are no longer liable to suffer the pains of eternal death. It removes, also, the *privative* part, and thus restores them to the forfeited favor of God, and to the happiness of heaven. All this is implied in freeing the returning sinner from the full penalty of the law; or, which is the same, in *forgiveness*; using the term forgiveness in the widest sense. But forgiveness, in this sense, is the same, precisely, as justification; the one *restoring* the subject of it as much as the other. And so the case was regarded by the apostle Paul. He repeatedly speaks of forgiveness and justification as the same: "Through this man is preached unto you *the forgiveness of sins*; and by him all that believe are *justified* from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13: 38). "Being *justified* freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for *the remission of sins*." (Rom. 3: 24). "David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works," or, which is the same, *justifieth*, "saying, Blessed are they whose *iniquities are forgiven*, and whose sin is covered" (Rom. 4: 6). The apostle here quotes from the thirty-second Psalm, in which David sets forth the blessedness of him who

had humbly confessed his sins, and been *forgiven*, representing such an one as *justified*; which shows that, in Paul's theology, justification and forgiveness are the same.

Calvin and other eminent theologians have taught the same doctrine. "The righteousness of faith," says Calvin, "is a reconciliation with God, which consists *SOLELY in the remission of sins.*" "The Lord cannot receive any one into favor or fellowship with himself, without making him, from a sinner, to be a righteous person. And this is accomplished by *the remission of sins.*" "It appears, then, that those whom God receives are made righteous no otherwise than as they are purified, by being cleansed from all their defilements, by *the remission of their sins*; so that such a righteousness may, in one word, be denominated *a remission of sins.*"¹

From these statements it appears, that justification and full forgiveness are the same; and hence the sufficiency of the sufferings and death of Christ to procure the one, as much as the other. And there is no need of bringing in the personal obedience of Christ, in order to make the atonement a sufficient ground of justification. His obedience or holiness is indispensably *connected* with the atonement, as before remarked; so indispensably, that without it no atonement could ever have been made. Still, the atonement itself consisted, not in the obedience of Christ, but in the shedding of his blood.

We are next to speak of the *efficacy* of Christ's death, or the manner in which it *availed* to make an atonement for sin.

Some have believed that, by suffering for us, Christ literally *paid our debt to divine justice*. So taught Anselm, in the twelfth century, and Aquinas in the thirteenth, and many others of later date, in both the Romish and Protestant churches. But to this theory, there are insuperable objections. In the first place, the demands of strict governmental justice against us are not of the nature of a debt, and cannot be cancelled as such. And then if they were, and if the atonement of Christ had cancelled them, we should owe

¹ Institutes, Book iii. Chap. xi. Sect. 21.

nothing to the law. The law would no longer have any demands against us. We should need no forgiveness, nor would forgiveness be possible; as there would be nothing to be forgiven.

Some have said, that the death of Christ availed to make an atonement for sinners, not by paying a literal debt, but by his suffering for them *the strict and proper penalty of the law*. But to this statement there are insuperable objections. The first grows out of the very *nature* of the penalty in question. This is *eternal death* — an eternal separation from God and all good, and the eternal destruction of body and soul in hell. It involves all the agonies of the bottomless pit; not the least part of which are *the direct results of indulged sin*, the indulgence of the most hateful, painful passions; the stings and reproaches of conscience; dissatisfaction with God and his government; and a perpetual, burning sense of his displeasure. Did our Saviour suffer all these, or any of them? Being perfectly holy, was it possible that he should? How could such a being endure the pains of unsated malice, envy, and revenge? How could he suffer from the stings and reproaches of conscience? In other words, how could he suffer the pains and agonies of the bottomless pit, which go to constitute the proper penalty of the law?

But suppose that Christ did suffer all this. Suppose him to have suffered, not only *as much* as all his elect would suffer in hell forever, but the *very same*, “agony for agony, and groan for groan,” would he, even then, have suffered the proper penalty of the law? Manifestly not; and for the very sufficient reason that he was not *the transgressor* of the law. The penalty of the law is denounced upon the transgressor, and upon no one else: “In the day that thou eatest thereof, *thou shalt surely die.*” “The soul that sinneth, *it shall die.*” Such is the language which the law uses, in setting forth its penalty; and we see, from the very terms employed, that *the penalty* can fall upon none but the transgressor. Another may step in, and endure a full *equivalent*, and so make a full expiation; but he cannot endure the proper *penalty*, even though he should suffer in kind and amount the same.

There is yet another objection to the theory in question, the same as that before considered : If Christ has suffered the full penalty of the law for us, then the law has no further demands against us. We need no forgiveness, nor is forgiveness possible. There is nothing left to be forgiven. Forgiveness is a remission of the incurred penalty of the law. But the penalty, on the supposition, has all been endured. It no longer remains to be remitted. God will not exact it twice ; nor can he remit it, when it is no longer due.

But it is argued, on the other side, that justice demands the full penalty of the law, which we, by transgression, have incurred ; nor will it be satisfied with anything less. Hence, if justice is satisfied in the atonement of Christ, he must have suffered the full penalty of the law. But is justice of such a nature, that it can be satisfied with nothing but the infliction of the literal penalty ? Does it admit of no substitute, no equivalent ? Then it precludes, entirely and always, the exercise of *mercy*. The demands of justice must, on this ground, be violated, or mercy is impossible.

But we do not so understand the claims of justice ; nor can they be so understood by any one who hopes in the mercy of the gospel. The demands of justice are answered, when its *ends* are answered ; and these may be as fully answered by a substitute, as in the punishment of the transgressor. And when the ends of justice are thus met and answered ; when the honor of the law is sustained, and the authority of the sovereign is fully vindicated ; now there is room for the exercise of mercy ; now the penalty of the law may be remitted, and no interest will suffer in consequence. The government is as strong in pardoning, as under other circumstances it would be in inflicting punishment. There is no injustice in treating sinners better than they deserve, when this can be done, in consistency with other objects and interests. Injustice rather consists in treating them worse than they deserve ; a mode of treatment most abhorrent to all the ends and aims of the atonement, and which none will ever receive at the hands of God.

It has been objected again to the views which have been

expressed, that the *veracity* of God is pledged to inflict the penalty of the law, in case of transgression; and, if it is not inflicted upon the sinner, it must be upon Christ. There is no other way in which the sinner's salvation can be reconciled with the divine veracity. In reply to this, we would ask, does the setting forth of the penalty of a law, in the form of a threatening, bind the veracity of the sovereign to inflict it? If it does, then certainly it binds him to inflict it on *the transgressor*; and a remission of the penalty is, in every case, a violation of truth. There is no avoiding this conclusion. The law does not merely denounce a penalty, but denounces it upon *the transgressor*; not upon him, or a *substitute*, but upon him *only*. "The soul that sinneth, *it*," and not some other soul, "shall die." Such is the unequivocal language of law; and if this pledges the veracity of the sovereign, forgiveness is forever impossible. God cannot violate his truth; and if his truth is really pledged in the threatening, it must be executed according to the letter; and what sinner can ever be saved?

But does a simple threatening, in all cases, bind the veracity of the sovereign? We think not. A threatening may so stand in connection with a promise, or be so involved in a covenant, as to pledge veracity; but a simple threatening of law, setting forth the penalty of the law, does not pledge it. The subject is not so understood among men; neither can it be so understood in respect to God. In dispensing pardon, a human government does not necessarily violate its truth; neither does the divine government. Just legislation, like justice itself, implies no necessity for punishment, except as *the ends* of punishment may require it. Let these ends be answered, and truth would lose the character of a virtue, if it should now prove a barrier to the free exercise of mercy. The penalty of a law, says John Howe, is "not to be taken for a *prediction* of what shall be, but a *commination* expressing what is deserved, or most justly may be." They who think otherwise, says Calvin, "labor under a delusion as to the meaning of threatenings, which, though they affirm simply, contain in them a tacit condition, depending on the result."

But if the sufferings of Christ did not avail to make an atonement, either by paying our debt to justice, or by his suffering the proper penalty of the law for us; how did they avail? In what does their atoning virtue or efficacy consist?

Before directly answering these questions, let us recur to some of the principles before laid down, when treating of the *necessity* of an atonement. We then said: "The law of God can be sustained by the infliction of the penalty on all those who have transgressed it. Can it be sustained in any other way? Is any *substitute* for this terrible infliction possible? A full substitute would be a sufficient atonement; but can any such substitute be found?"

It is our happiness to know that such a substitute *has been provided*, in the voluntary sufferings and death of Christ. He endured, not the proper penalty of the law, but a complete governmental *substitute* for the penalty. His sufferings and death in our room and stead as fully sustain the authority of law, as fully meet the demands of justice, as fully answer all the purposes of the divine government, as would the infliction of the penalty itself; and consequently are a complete *substitute* for the penalty; or, in other words, a complete atonement.

It is commonly and justly understood among evangelical Christians, that Christ's death was *vicarious*, or that he died as a *substitute*. But a substitute how? and for what? Not that he endured the proper penalty of the law for us, but that he endured an adequate *substitute for that penalty*; so that the penalty itself may now be safely and consistently remitted. Were the penalty all borne, there would be nothing to be remitted. But as it has not been borne, but only a substitute for it; as it has not been removed, but only a way opened in which it may be; there is as much need of forgiveness, and as much to be forgiven, as though the Saviour had not died.

The view here taken as to the manner in which Christ's death avails to make an atonement for us, is believed to be the general prevailing sentiment of evangelical Christians on the subject. For though some excellent men have denied it

in terms, insisting that Christ did bear the proper penalty of the law, yet, when they come to explain, and answer objections, they insensibly fall into the other view, as that alone which will bear a thorough examination. Thus a writer in the late Dr. Green's *Christian Advocate*, says, that "the Redeemer did not endure eternal death," but "the infinite dignity of his person imparted to his temporary suffering, a value that made them a *fair and full equivalent* for the everlasting sufferings of all who shall be finally saved."¹ Dr. Hopkins also, in his excellent chapter on "the Design and Work of the Redeemer," after having said more than once that Christ bore the penalty of the law for us, brings out his real meaning, in language such as this: "He suffered the evil threatened, or *as great evil, a complete equivalent*, if not precisely the same evil in every circumstance, which the sinner must have suffered, had the threatening been executed on him. All the ends of the threatening, and of the penalty, are as fully answered by the sufferings of Christ, as they could be by the execution of it on the sinner."² The younger Edwards, too, in his *Sermons on the Atonement*, which we really think the most satisfactory discussion of the subject which has ever been given to the American public, says, that "the atonement of Christ is a *substitute* for the punishment of the sinner, according to the divine law, and is designed to support the authority of that law, equally as the punishment of hell."³ So Dr. Woods, speaking of the penalty of the law, says: "Christ suffered it *virtually*. He suffered that which had a *like effect*, or which had a *like value* in God's moral government. As to the ends of government, it was as though the curse of the law had been endured literally. So that it is sufficiently correct, for common purposes, to say, as Storr and Flatt and a thousand others have said, that Christ endured the penalty of the law; that he suffered the punishment due to sin."⁴ This shows how Dr. Woods understood those writers, who use the

¹ Volume for 1826, pp. 388, 389.

² Works, Vol. II. p. 38.

³ Works, Vol. I. p. 340.

⁴ Works, Vol. II. p. 473.

phraseology of Storr and Flatt. Indeed he says that the view we have taken, — Christ suffering, not the literal penalty, but an *equivalent*, a *substitute*, — is the only reasonable view; the only one which a sober man can take.

Having dwelt thus long on the more essential features of the atonement, we now pass to a consideration of some minor collateral questions.

Our first inquiry will be as to the *extent* of the atonement. Is it *universal* or *particular*? Is it sufficient for all men, or only for the elect?

Without doubt the atonement was intended to be applied, savingly, only to the elect. In other words, it was certain to the mind of God, from all eternity, that none but the elect would embrace it, and be saved by it. Still we believe that, as to its *sufficiency*, the atonement is strictly *universal*. We might infer as much as this from the *nature* of the atonement. It is, in its nature, general, unlimited, we had almost said infinite. It *can* be limited by nothing but the good pleasure of him who made it, or by the extent of the race for whom it was made.

Then the Scriptures decide, expressly, that the atonement was made for *all men*. Christ is said to have "died for all" (2 Cor. 5: 14). He "gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2: 6). He "tasted death for every man" (Heb. 2: 9). He is "the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2: 2).

Again, the offers of the gospel, which are all based on the atonement, are strictly universal: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whosoever will, let him take the waters of life freely." It cannot be supposed that God would offer salvation to those for whom no atonement had been made, and to whom salvation would be impossible were the offer accepted. Yet he certainly does offer salvation, to all men, in the gospel. All, without exception, are invited to come, and partake of the waters of life freely.

It should be further considered, that all men are actually receiving benefits, in this life, through the atonement. Our very existence in this world of light and hope, the blessings of Providence we here enjoy, our means of grace, our probation of grace, indeed everything we receive which is better than the perdition of ungodly men, all is a matter of grace and mercy, and all comes to us through the atonement and intercession of Christ. The fact that the non-elect here upon earth are now receiving blessings through the atonement, all the blessings they have ever received, or ever will, is proof that the atonement was made for them, and is sufficient, if they would embrace it, for their salvation.

We next inquire for evidence that divine justice is *satisfied* in the atonement, and that it has been accepted of the Father. We have evidence of this fact in the divine and perfect *character* of the Saviour. He would not have undertaken that which he had not the intention and the ability to accomplish. He would not have declared the atonement finished, when he bowed his head and gave up the ghost, if it were still unfinished and incomplete.

Again, the Father openly manifested his acceptance of the atonement by *raising the Saviour from the dead*. Accordingly, Christ is said to have been "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." He is also declared to be "the Son of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead."

It may be further remarked, that every believer who has been pardoned and saved through the atonement, every justified soul now in existence, whether on earth or in heaven, is a living witness that the atonement has been accepted. Would God have justified any of our fallen race on this ground, and received them back to his favor and love, if justice were not satisfied, and the work of atonement was not complete.

It may be inquired, in this connection, how much Christ must have suffered in order to satisfy divine justice, and make a full atonement for sin. *How much?* Though we may not be able to answer this question with definiteness

positively, we may *negatively*. Christ did not suffer the same, either in kind or amount, which all mankind must have suffered in hell, had no atonement been made for them. That he should have suffered the same in *kind* is, in the very nature of things, impossible, as we have before seen. In order to this, he must have had the feelings of the lost, and been like them in character. And that he suffered the same in amount, is also impossible, but upon the supposition that his Divine nature suffered, and for the time infinitely. His whole Divinity must have been permeated and filled with suffering. But this terrible supposition cannot be admitted for a moment. It is inconsistent with the nature and perfections of God. That theologians of a certain class have been led to adopt a supposition so monstrous, is evidence only of the straits into which they are driven.

We suppose Christ to have suffered in his human nature only. Still, we believe him to have suffered more, inconceivably more, than any mere man could have suffered in the same time. The Divine nature did not suffer; but by its personal union with the human, it sustained and enabled the man Christ Jesus to endure a weight of suffering, which otherwise must have crushed him in a moment. Though Christ did not endure the proper penalty of the law for sinners, he did endure what God was pleased to appoint and accept as an *equivalent*, a *substitute*, for the penalty. He endured enough, considering the infinite dignity and glory of his person, and his ineffable nearness to the Father, to make as bright a display of the justice of God, of his regard for his law, and of his holy hatred of sin, as could have been made in the eternal destruction of our guilty race. By his sufferings and death, he as fully satisfied all intelligent beings, that God was a righteous moral governor; that he loved his law, and was resolved to sustain it; that he hated sin, and was determined to punish it; as they could have been, had they seen our whole race suffering in the world of woe.

And here we see the reason why, in order to his performing the work of atonement, Christ must have been just such

a personage, God and man, Divine and human, as he is represented in the Scriptures. Had he been a divine person only, he could not have made an atonement, because the Divine nature cannot suffer and die. And had he been a human person only, he could not have made an atonement, because he would have been unable, without the Divine nature, to endure the requisite amount of suffering, and he would have lacked that personal dignity and glory, which impart such a value and efficacy to his death. We see, therefore, the necessity, if Christ was to make an atonement for sin, that he should be, what the Scriptures represent him to be, *God and man*, two distinct natures united in one mysterious and glorious *person*.

It may be inquired yet again, whether the atonement has any different bearing in relation to infants, from what it has in the case of adults. Those who believe that infants have a sinful nature, or a depraved, corrupt nature that is not sinful, commonly insist, that to those of them who die in infancy, the atonement is in some way applied, so as to remove the corruption, and prepare them for heaven. But we can perceive no adaptation in the atonement to produce such a result, nor do we think that it is ever produced in this way. The atonement lays a foundation for the forgiveness of sins, to those who are renewed and recovered from them. Of itself, the atonement saves nobody. It savingly benefits no one, great or small, until his heart is sanctified; and this work of sanctification belongs to the Spirit, and not directly to the atonement. When the appropriate work of the Spirit is accomplished on the heart, and never before, can the saving efficacy of the atonement be realized, in the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of the soul.

If infants are human beings, moral agents, having selfish and sinful affections from the first; then they are capable of holy affections; then they may be sanctified from the womb, as we know that some have been. (See Luke 1: 15.) And when sanctified, they may be forgiven through the atonement of Christ, and saved with the salvation of the gospel. It is on this ground, and this only, that we hope

(as we confidently do) for the salvation of the dying infant. He is purified by the Spirit, and cleansed by the blood of Christ, in much the same manner as the adult.

As to the importance of the great doctrine here discussed, it is difficult to speak in terms of sufficient strength. It is of vast interest and importance in itself. It is important in all its relations and consequences. It is the grand central doctrine of the whole Christian system, without which the rest would lose their significance, and the system could not be held together. It is the ground-work of our present probation of grace, and of that variety of blessings which stand connected with our probation. It is the foundation of all our hopes beyond the grave. It is the corner stone of Zion, on which the whole church rests, and will rest forever.

The atonement is a subject which interests, not our world merely, but the entire moral universe, and will do so forever. Angels are looking into it with admiring attention, and the whole upper world are engaged together in celebrating its wonders and glories. The countless myriads in heaven *know* vastly more of the Supreme Being, they love him better, they enjoy him more, they will be unspeakably more happy to all eternity, than could have been possible, had not a Saviour died.

ARTICLE V.

PLACE AND CONDITION OF THE DEPARTED.

By N. H. Griffin, Professor in Williams College.

“TO-DAY shalt thou be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23: 43). What are we to understand by this language? What does it teach respecting the dead? It will be our object to answer, as we are able, these questions.