

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

THE  
CHURCHMAN

---

APRIL, 1904.

---

ART. I.—GETHSEMANE.

THERE are two great scenes of conflict in our Lord's earthly life, the one at the beginning and the other at the end of His ministry. In the first He was tempted to accomplish His work as Saviour by wrong means and for selfish ends. In the last He was tempted to forego that work altogether. In the first He was tempted to a carnal use of Divine gifts, to presumption, to worldly ambition—to win the conquest of a world, not by submission and suffering and the Cross, but by alliance with the Kingdom and Power of Darkness. In the last He was tried by the shrinking of His human nature from the bitter anguish and horror of a death in which He was to be made a sacrifice for human sin.

But it is not only the nature of the two temptations which is different: the manner in which our Lord meets them is different, and is surely of the deepest significance. In the first, however galling the arrows of temptation, we read of no weakness, no shrinking, no hesitation. Hateful as the suggestions of evil must have been to His pure and spotless nature, there is no trace of the soreness and the pain of conflict. Jesus is throughout the Conqueror, serene in His majestic power and in the certainty of victory. Each temptation is met and mastered as soon as it is presented. Filled with the Spirit who descended upon Him at His baptism, He is "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil." In the strength of the Spirit He encounters His adversary. Armed with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, He silences and drives away the Evil One. "The Devil leaveth Him, and behold angels came and ministered unto Him."

But it is not so in the closing scene. As He passes within the shadow of death, a horrible dread overwhelms Him. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death" is His confession, and He casts Himself down with His face upon the earth, and pleads with His Father in the bitter anguish of His spirit. "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!"

And as there was this shrinking of the human nature, this sorrow, this darkness, so there was also here what there had not been before, the craving for human sympathy. In the first conflict Jesus was alone in the wilderness: in the last He takes with Him His chosen disciples, to be the witnesses of His agony. If He leaves them to pray, He returns to them for relief. He clings to these poor weak human friends as if they could lighten His burden; He tears Himself from them (such is the exact force of the word which St. Luke employs), and again wrestles with His Father in prayer; and when He finds them unable to bear the burden of His great grief, and asleep through sorrow, He pleads with them: "Simon, sleepest thou? Could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

Is there not a profound mystery here? Why is it that there is now this sorrow, this anguish, this fervent prayer that the cup may be taken away? Why is it that even the very thought and prospect of this last agony seems to disturb the spirit so calm in its deep repose and in the sense of its union with the Father? Even before this He had said, looking forward to His last hour, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" as though He would shorten if He could the passage, and meet the bitterness at once. And again, drawing yet nearer to the end, as with prophetic eye He beholds the glorious issue of His redeeming work, and can say, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit," the cold shadow passes over His soul, the human nature shrinks: "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour." "He saw it afar off, and—if we may venture to say it—was eager to have it over. When it came near, it filled Him with agitation, and at last with terror."<sup>1</sup>

Contrast His words in Gethsemane with those He had uttered just before. Read that wonderful prayer of solemn self-consecration which, as the great High Priest of His Church, He offers to the Father. How sublime it is in its assertion of perfect union with the Father, how unhesitating in the consciousness

---

<sup>1</sup> See Dale on the "Atonement," p. 54.

of a work fulfilled, a God glorified, a Church gathered in to be united for ever in the same mysterious oneness as that which unites the Father and the Son! If there is indeed the remembrance in those words, "For their sakes I sanctify Myself," that He is the Victim as well as the Priest; if, when He says "And now I come to Thee," He knows it must be through the shame and the scourging and the Cross, yet there is no trouble on the Spirit, no conflict in the soul of the Redeemer. The love of His Father fills His heart; union with His Father and His brethren, the Father's name manifested unto them, the life eternal and the glory given them—these swallow up all other thoughts.

And yet He who says, "Father, glorify Thy Name, glorify it in the redeeming death, as well as in the victorious life, in the victorious life in and through the redeeming death"; He who says, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," signifying thereby what death He should die; He who knew all the blessedness of that redeeming work in rescuing the miserable captives of Satan from his cruel thralldom and making them free with the blessed freedom of God's elect; He who knew all the glory that should follow when He and they should sit down together in His Father's kingdom, yet trembles at the last, and is "amazed and is exceeding sorrowful even unto death" when the awful shadow of the Cross falls upon His soul.

The brightness of the vision has faded; the glory is hidden; the conflict and the sorrow have shut it out. There is the cry of the human spirit in its agony: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me."

Men have found this strange. Cold critics would even persuade us that only one of these two portraits can be true. Either Jesus never uttered that Divine prayer, or He did not wrestle thus with death in Gethsemane. And yet surely one hour of Christian experience may convince us how worthless such criticism is. Have we never known what it was in communion with God to gain some self-conquest, to obtain the power from Him for some self-sacrifice? Have we never known the joy of that self-surrender, the nearness to our Father, the blessedness of a sense of union with Him? And then has there not come the reaction? Has not the human nature reasserted itself? Has not the sacrifice and the self-surrender appeared in all its painfulness, in all its opposition to the flesh? and in the anguish of our heart we have been ready to say: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

So, too, from that serene height of heavenly communion with the Father, Jesus, like us, must descend into the cold,

dark valley of the shadow of death, in this, as in all things else, our example and our sympathizing High Priest.

Dare we ask why is this? What means this fear, this mortal agony? May we presume with all reverence and all humility to ponder the mystery? I know we cannot comprehend it. He who lies there with His face on the ground in the cold night amid the olives of the garden is God as well as Man. He is God, or He is not our Saviour; He is God, or His agony to us is nothing worth, for it has not redeemed us from our sin. But therefore, also, we cannot explain it. You cannot fathom a Divine sorrow, you cannot comprehend the mystery of a Divine darkness; we might as well hope to fathom the deep of the sea with our outstretched arm, or to compass it about with the swaddling bands of an infant. Surely if all sorrow is a sacred thing, not to be rudely and harshly intruded upon, and if the deeper the character and the more real the grief, the less it admits of vulgar sympathy, so much more must the anguish and sorrow of the Divine Sufferer be above the reach of our comprehension.

But *this* we do know, that His sorrow was not a selfish sorrow, but a sorrow for our sins. Jesus did not shrink from the bodily pain He was about to endure. He did not dread death merely as death. It was not even the shamefulness of such a death from which He recoiled, though, to the keen sensibility of a perfect nature, that may have been more terrible, perhaps, even than the physical anguish; it was not because it was a death in which He was reckoned as a malefactor, or because it was inflicted by the hands of those whom He had spent His life in blessing—it was not all this that made the Saviour's soul so heavy. It was not for this that He began to be "amazed and exceeding sorrowful"; it was not this that made him seek the companionship and the sympathy of His chosen disciples; it was not this which cast Him on His face to the ground, and wrung from Him the bloody sweat, and forced from His lips the prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." Then He would have been weaker than the tender maiden and the boy who have died for His Name; then His courage would have been less than the courage of a Socrates or a Seneca. If with strong crying and tears He made supplication to Him who was able to save Him from death, yet it was not the physical pain even of crucifixion from which He prayed for deliverance. It was because His death was an expiation, was an atonement for sin; it was because upon Him, the innocent Victim, the Lord laid "the iniquities of us all."

It was because "He made His soul an offering for sin"; because "He bare our sins in His own body on the tree," "and

gave His life as ransom for many." It was because God "made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." But though Holy Scripture tells us this, it is difficult for us to comprehend fully the mystery of our Lord's agony, nor, indeed, could we ever presume to do so. But in order that we may more nearly understand the greatness of the temptation, I would suggest comparing it yet again with the first temptation. I do not think that that was a light temptation. I did not mean so to represent it. I believe that the suggestions of the Evil One must have been infinitely hateful to our Lord's pure human soul. But, still, those suggestions were all to gratify human nature, and in so doing to commit sin, which, if not in itself evil, was evil in the particular circumstances in which our Lord was placed—evil as contrary to the ends and purposes of His ministry and to His Father's will concerning Him. But notice the peculiarity of this last temptation. It was addressed to that which was purest and holiest in Him. The terribleness of it was this—that He in His holy, spotless soul was brought into direct and immediate contact with the whole power of evil, as a thing with which He was to identify Himself and make it His own.

If He refused, He would apparently be *severing Himself from evil*. Do we not see that the recoil here from submission was in itself a right recoil? If it be true that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness of men, and if the mind of our Lord was in perfect accordance, as we know it was, with the mind of the Father, then how intense must have been His abhorrence of the sin, how fearful to make it His own.

In the wilderness He was tempted to assert Himself, to prove, as it were, to Himself and to the world that He was the Son of God and the Messiah of His people—by the extraordinary splendour of His gifts, to inaugurate a reign of visible majesty upon earth. In the garden the temptation is far more subtle. It is to *recoil from evil*. It is to have nothing to do with sin, because sin is hateful. It is to shrink from the contamination. It is, not to put forth supernatural power, but to manifest everlasting holiness. It is to forsake sinners rather than take the burden of their sin. What could be more awful than for the infinite holiness of God to make all evil its own, that so the evil might be put away? And here was the greatness of the love, here the perfection of the obedience, that, in order to accomplish man's salvation, Christ did not shrink from this extremest test, this last suffering, this bitterest agony, that, being "made sin for us," He might

save us from sin. I believe that in this lay the supremest agony of those moments in Gethsemane.

Dr. Dale, in his masterly work on the "Atonement" (pp. 60-62), finds the explanation of the agony in the garden in Christ's foreknowledge of the awful separation from His Father on the Cross; that in the hour of darkness, at the very time when He knew He was accomplishing His Father's will, yet He must lose the comfort and blessedness of God's presence and love.

To me this view seems inconsistent with our Lord's words in St. John xvi. 32: "Behold the hour cometh, yea, is come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet *I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.*" He knew that He should be forsaken of *men*, that all human sympathy would fail Him when He most needed it; but there is no hint given us anywhere that He foresaw the severance of the blessed union with the Father, else how can we explain the mysterious cry wrung from Him on the Cross, "My God, My God, *why* hast Thou forsaken Me"? I cannot help thinking that the explanation which I have suggested is alone consistent with the Gospel accounts.

But Holy Scripture casts another light upon our Lord's sufferings—tells us of another meaning in them which we must not forget. Holy Scripture tells us that those sufferings were necessary for Him in order to the perfection of His human nature, and necessary also that we might have the perfection of His sympathy in our trials. They were necessary for Him in order to the perfection of His human nature. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered, and being made perfect He became the Author of Eternal Salvation to all that obey Him." This is what we are told. Let us try to understand it. Mysterious as it seems, the truth is certain.

We must notice, then, first that there is a difference between sinlessness and perfection. Adam in Paradise was sinless, but Adam in Paradise was not perfect. He was sinless because he was created in the image of God, but he was not perfect, because he had never been put to the test. Perfection implies growth and development in the moral and spiritual being; these imply choice deliberately exercised, and choice deliberately exercised implies temptation and trial. Without this, in the absence of struggle and conflict, in the absence of the pain of resistance to evil and the perseverance in that which is right, there can be no victory. The fibres of the moral being have not been tested. Hence, as there was in our Blessed Lord that growth in wisdom which was evidence that His Divine nature did not supersede or dispense with the

laws of His human nature, so likewise He encountered temptation and trial in order that, being in *all things* made like unto us, He might for us and in our nature overcome temptation, and thus through temptation be made perfect.

But also this trial was necessary to the perfection of His human sympathy; necessary in order that He might be a faithful and merciful High Priest; necessary that, having suffered being tempted, He might be able to succour them that are tempted. For we must feel that Divine succour is not enough. The poor crushed, bleeding human heart craves the sympathy of a heart like its own. It cannot rest on the arm of Omnipotence if it does not know whether that Omnipotence can be touched with a feeling of its infirmities. And there is nothing more precious in the record of our Lord's agony in the garden than the assurance that it gives us of His perfect sympathy with us—of His sympathy with us in our loneliness, and His sympathy with us in our sorrow.

To conclude, let me say that if we cannot fully understand the agony in Gethsemane, yet we can at least adore the love, we can at least catch some glimpse of the greatness of the sacrifice. That my sin occasioned this awful sorrow gives me at least some measure of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. That He, the Holy One of God, should have identified Himself with my sin, borne it in His own body, put it away by the sacrifice of Himself; that to redeem me the Son of God Himself was made sin in my flesh—this is a revelation of the love of God which must touch any heart not altogether callous and insensible. And I can thankfully lay hold of this fact even if I cannot interpret it; I can feel the love; I can cast my soul upon it for life or for death; I can say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

J. J. S. PEROWNE,  
Bishop.



## ART. II.—THE BOOK OF GENESIS.

THE publication of Dr. Driver's book on Genesis, in the series called the "Westminster Commentaries," edited by Dr. Lock, prefaced by what we would venture to call a somewhat diplomatic utterance from the general editor, coming as it does after a long interval, during which no leading commentary on this book, which has continued to hold the field, has appeared in England, will naturally arouse a fresh interest in the many debatable subjects which gather around its treatment, and perhaps call for their reconsideration or their retreatment on other lines.