

# VICARIOUS ATONEMENT THROUGH CHRIST



LOUIS BERKHOF



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by Louis Berkhof

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## Objections to the Doctrine of a Limited Atonement Considered

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## **Preface**

TO some this little treatise on the atonement will undoubtedly seem like the voice of a distant and forgotten past, strangely out of place in the modern world. They cannot conceive of any one still believing the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. Are we not told repeatedly that no sensible man believes this doctrine today? Does not Ballard assert that “all notions of appeasing an angry God, or ‘satisfying’ divine justice, are pagan”; and does not even a Scottish Presbyterian like David Smith relegate this doctrine to the limbo of theological antiquities? Has it not become fashionable to ignore it in the pulpit and even to express a horror of “blood-theology”? And do not the winds of doctrine that blow in upon us through the radio represent a strong counter-current?

Happily, however, there is still a goodly number that does not worship at the shrine of the modern spirit, that finds joy and peace in the doctrine of the vicarious sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and that continues to glory in “the foolishness of the cross.” For them this book may probably be of some service. It may promote a better understanding here and there of this central doctrine of redemption. It may in some cases strengthen and deepen the conviction that the penal substitutionary doctrine is the only Scriptural doctrine of the atonement. And it may help some to defend their position over against those who question this doctrine or even boldly renounce it.

The book is sent forth as a testimony to the truth of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, with the prayer that the Lord of the Church may bless the message which it conveys, and may thus ever-increasingly "see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied."

L. Berkhof.

## **A Central Doctrine in Eclipse**

Atonement central in the Christian religion.

CHRISTIANITY is pre-eminently a religion of redemption. It proceeds on the assumption that man's relation was disturbed by the entrance of sin into the world, and that the present natural development of his life is so abnormal that it, left to itself, can only terminate in eternal destruction. And it teaches us that God does not permit sin to run its free course and to encompass the whole human race in utter ruin. It brings a message of reconciliation and offers a way of escape from the ravages of sin and from its destructive power,—and this way is the way of the cross. Reconciliation through atonement by the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of atonement has always been regarded as central in the Christian religion and as the very marrow of theology. It has been called "the chief part of our salvation," "the anchor of faith," "the refuge of hope," "the heart of the gospel," "the keystone of the Christian religion," and so on. Robert S. Franks says in his valuable *History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, I, p. 5: "For where in the whole doctrinal system is there a single doctrine which is more a microcosm of the whole? The doctrine of 'the saving effects of Christ's incarnation, life, passion, death, and resurrection' is indeed in miniature the whole of Christianity, and has indeed more than

once in the history of the Church been treated so as to include practically the whole of Christianity." Even modern liberal theologians often speak of it as a central and essential truth, though they differ widely in their conception of it from the interpretation which the Church of all ages has given of this important truth.

#### Doctrine of vicarious atonement in the Church.

We may even be a little more specific. The doctrine of vicarious or substitutionary atonement always formed an important element in the faith of the Church, and is the only view of the atonement ever incorporated in its historical Confessions. It is true that the work of Christ was not always interpreted in the same way, and that different periods of time often brought a change of emphasis. The doctrines of the Church were not found precisely formulated in Scripture, but were the result of the Church's reflection on the truth. They were not fully apprehended at once, and were not all developed at the same time. The doctrines of the Trinity, of the Person of Christ, and of Sin and Grace were formulated long before the doctrine of the Redemptive Work of Christ.

#### Views of Early Church Fathers.

The views of the early Church Fathers can only be gathered from casual and partial expressions of the truth, which are wanting in definiteness and sometimes even contradictory. They speak of Jesus alternately as the Redeemer from ignorance and misery, or from sin and the devil. Their particular emphasis usually corresponds to the evil of which they were most poignantly conscious and from which they eagerly sought deliverance. Some stress the fact that Christ brought a new revelation of God and thus dispelled the ignorance of man. Others give prominence to the idea that He communicated new life to man and in a sense deified human nature. And still others emphasize the thought that He bore the penalty of sin and thereby redeemed man from spiritual slavery. Again, some find the great redemptive fact primarily in the incarnation, and others

perceive it above all in the sufferings and death of Christ. In several cases these thoughts are placed right alongside of each other by the same authors without any proper synthesis.

However—and this is the point to be noted—from the very start the idea was present in Christian literature that the death of Christ was sacrificial, atoned for sin, and effected reconciliation between God and man. This thought was sometimes expressed in the peculiar form that Christ paid a ransom to the devil, but it was there and was clearly very persistent. It gains definiteness and precision in Augustine's *Enchiridion*, where it is explicitly stated that men were under the wrath of God, and that the death of Christ served to propitiate God and thus reconciled God and man. His statement is free from ambiguity. Gregory the Great brings out with even greater clearness the Godward aspect, the sacrificial and vicarious nature, and the saving effect of the atonement through the death of Christ. He stresses the fact that only the sacrifice of Christ, as that of a sinless man, could atone for the sin of the human race. The French writer Riviere speaks of one passage in his works as "the completest synthesis of (ancient) Latin theology on the atonement."

Anselm on the Atonement.

The honor of first presenting the doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ in anything like a complete form, however, goes to Anselm. His *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became Man), though small, was a truly epoch-making work and contained nearly all the essential elements of a real satisfaction theory. Anselm emphasized the seriousness of sin as an infringement of the honor of God, grounded the necessity of the atonement in the very nature of the divine Being, regarded the death of Christ as the only possible adequate satisfaction to the divine honor, and clearly taught that the merits of Christ were accredited to man. But however excellent his construction of this doctrine was, it also had some serious defects. He grounded the necessity of the atonement in the honor rather than in the justice of God, placed the whole burden of the

atonement on the death of Christ, as if his life did not count, failed to do justice to the penal character of the supreme sacrifice, and represented the transfer of the merits of the Redeemer to the sinner in a rather external way, thus exposing his theory to the stricture embodied in the name "Commercial Theory." The Anselmian conception of the atonement remained the dominant view in later Scholasticism, though it was not always adopted without modification, and sometimes even appeared in combination with elements of the Abelardian view.

### Reformers on the Atonement.

The Reformers continued to move in the general direction indicated by Anselm, though differing with him on some points. They do not so clearly and explicitly base the necessity of the atonement on the inner nature of God—though their construction of the doctrine favors this—but seem to ground it on the divine decree. Moreover, they remedy some of the defects of the Anselmian theory. They regard the atonement as a satisfaction to the justice rather than to the honor of God, stress the penal nature of the sufferings and death of Christ, ascribe atoning significance also to the life of the Redeemer, and clearly point out that the fruits of His work are mediated to sinners through the mystical union and appropriated by faith. The penal substitutionary view of the atonement became the official doctrine of the Church and is found in all the great historic Confessions of Christendom. It is and remains to this day the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One cannot exchange it for another view without introducing a gospel which is not a gospel.

### Opposition to the doctrine of vicarious Atonement.

It is a sad fact, however, that the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement is not as popular today as it deserves to be. There was strong opposition to it right down from the days of Anselm. Abelard pitted his Moral Influence Theory against the Anselmian view, and Duns Scotus with his Acceptilation Theory strengthened

the opposition. After the Reformation Faustus Socinus launched a seemingly rather formidable attack upon the doctrine of the Reformers and offered a substitute for it in his Example Theory. Keen dialectics enlisted to establish a poor theology. Grotius ostensibly came to the defense of the doctrine of satisfaction in his famous Defense of the Catholic Faith Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ, a work characterized by subtlety, acuteness, and great learning. In reality, however, he only succeeded in steering a middle course between the doctrine of the Reformers and the Socinian theory. His Governmental Theory represented a half-way position which satisfied neither one of the contending parties. Even the Arminians found it necessary to modify his views.

Under the influence of Rationalism and of what is usually called "the modern scientific spirit" the doctrine of vicarious atonement gradually lost its hold on the hearts and minds of ever-increasing numbers, and was supplanted by other views in the teaching, not only of creedless Churches, but even of some which still claim adherence to one or more of the great historic Confessions. In his Introduction to Remensnyder's work on The Atonement and Modern Thought, p. XVI, Dr. Warfield says: "Probably the majority of those who hold the public ear have definitely broken with the doctrine of substitutive atonement." They call it unethical, contradictory, and subversive of the truth. In New England theology the Governmental Theory of the atonement was revived. This theory, says Dr. Warfield, to quote once more from the same Introduction, p. XVII, "has come to be the orthodox Arminian view and is taught as such by the leading exponents of modern Arminian thought whether in Britain or America.... But not only is it thus practically universal among the Wesleyan Arminians. It has also become the mark of Nonconformity in Great Britain and of orthodox Congregationalism in America. Nor has it failed to take a strong hold of Scottish Presbyterianism; and on the continent of Europe it is widespread among the saner teachers."

But even this theory does not mark the last step in the downward grade. It retains at least an appearance of objectivity, that is, of the idea that God required some satisfaction, in order that He might pardon sin, an idea that is repugnant to those who stress the Fatherhood of God and regard love as the all-controlling perfection of the divine Being. There has long been a decided drift in the direction of the Moral Influence Theory, which was first advocated by Abelard. Treatises such as those of Frederick Denison Maurice, John Young, McLeod Campbell, and Horace Bushnell, did not fail to catch the public ear and to find favor with the people. It is even more emphatic than the Grotian theory in making man's repentance the real atoning fact and the only condition of forgiveness. The secret of its popularity lies exactly in its purely ethical construction of the doctrine of the atonement.

Several important treatises have been written during the last half of the previous century to stem the tide of subjectivism, such as the works of A. A. Hodge, W. Symington, H. Martin, G. Smeaton, T.J. Crawford, R. Dabney, and others, on the atonement. They have undoubtedly retarded the process of deterioration somewhat, but did not succeed in turning the tide. The doctrine of vicarious atonement is in discredit today. Even a Scot like David Smith writes of it: "It still indeed persists, but its vitality is gone: it is withered like an uprooted tree. What happened in previous periods of transition is once more being enacted before our eyes. Just as St. Bernard clung to the outworn Ransom Theory and refused to let it go, fancying that its abandonment involved a denial of the truth which it so imperfectly expressed, so some now, unconscious of the new order, are content with the old formula; while others, recognizing its insufficiency, labor to rehabilitate and readjust it, thus putting new wine into old wine-skins. It is a vain attempt. The Forensic Theory belongs to a bygone age. It has passed like its predecessors into the limbo of theological antiquities; and the task of faith is not to galvanize the dead past but to welcome the new order and re-interpret the ancient truth and commend it to the

modern mind." *The Atonement in the Light of History and the Modern Spirit*, p. 124.

Whither will this modern spirit lead us? Where will it finally terminate in its interpretation of the atonement? Its evident tendency is to rob us completely of our "only High Priest," and to leave us a great ethical Teacher to whom the categories of the priesthood do not apply. It stresses the redemptive significance of the life of Christ, and then makes rather painful and sorry attempts to find some liberating meaning in His death. While it continues to speak of atonement, it really empties this term of all real meaning. What pitiful fragments it leaves us of the doctrine of the atonement can best be seen in such works as Campbell's *The New Theology*, Rauschenbusch's *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, and Shailer Mathew's *The Atonement and the Social Process*.

In view of the central significance of the doctrine of the atonement in the Christian religion, of the widespread tendency to ethicize it and denude it of its objective and vicarious nature, and of the virtual denial of it in many circles, a study of the subject in the light of Scripture and with reference to present day conceptions becomes one of vital importance.

## **Historic Theories of the Atonement**

Atonement in the early Fathers.

FOR a proper understanding of the following discussion a brief statement of the different theories of atonement is highly desirable. As indicated in the previous chapter the early Church Fathers contributed very little to the construction of this doctrine. They frequently express the general biblical idea that love constrained Christ to suffer and die for sinners, and, especially in the earliest

period, usually confine themselves to the language of Scripture. And when the Fathers of the second, third, and fourth centuries begin to speak in more specific terms about the work of Christ, their representations do not always agree. Sometimes they stress the fact that Christ appeared as the Logos to impart a fuller revelation of the truth to man and to give him an example of true virtue. Then again, at least some of them teach that Christ gave Himself as a ransom to Satan for the deliverance of man, and then Himself escaped from the clutches of the devil by the power of His divinity. In some cases they conceive of sin as an evil power rather than as guilt, and speak of Christ as delivering man from sensuality and mortality and imparting to him true holiness and the gift of eternal life. And, finally, they also express the thought that Christ suffered and died as a substitute for man, to deliver him from the power of guilt and pollution, and to obtain for him the forgiveness of sins, complete sanctification, and eternal bliss.

#### Contrasted theories.

In the Scholastic period the idea of Christ as a ransom to Satan gradually died out, but the mystical, ethical, and judicial conceptions of his saving work all recur. The last two, presented in different forms in the course of history, proved to be the most persistent. They developed more and more into antagonistic and rival theories. The advocates of the ethical view regard sin primarily as ignorance, as ethical corruption, and as an evil power, while the champions of the judicial theory consider it above all as guilt in the sight of God. The former ground the need of the atonement—in so far as there is any need—in the intellectual and moral disabilities of man, while the latter infer its absolute necessity from the very nature of God. Once more, the former conceive of the atonement as entirely subjective, that is, as aiming exclusively at the reconciliation of the sinner to God, while the latter maintain that it is altogether objective, and as such aims primarily at the reconciliation of God to the sinner and only secondarily at the reconciliation of the sinner to God.

## Satisfaction or Commercial Theory of Anselm.

Anselm of Canterbury was the first scholar to offer a rather complete theory of the atonement towards the close of the eleventh century. The purpose of his brief treatise, *Cur Deus Homo*, was to establish the absolute necessity of the atonement. His fundamental assumption was that man by sinning offended the honor of God. Now God could either punish man or demand satisfaction of him. Since the former alternative would have involved the destruction of man, His handiwork, He chose the latter, in order that man might be saved. The satisfaction required was an infinite satisfaction, such as no mere man could render; and therefore it became necessary for the Son of God to become man, in order to satisfy the divine honor. The God-man could not render to God the required satisfaction by consecrating His life to Him, since He already owed this to God for Himself. He could do it only by submitting voluntarily to sufferings and death, for as a sinless being He was not obliged to suffer and to die. The gift thus offered to God was of infinite value and therefore called for a reward. Since the Son of God, who already possessed all things, did not need anything for Himself, He passed the reward on to the sinner in the form of redemption. Thus the work of Christ accrues to the benefit of man.

## Abelard's Moral Influence Theory.

This view of Anselm met with considerable opposition. The greatest of his immediate opponents was Abelard, one of the acutest and most subtle of the Scholastics. While Anselm's conception of the atonement was judicial and objective, that of Abelard was ethical and subjective. His fundamental postulate is that God could have forgiven sins apart from the passion of Christ, merely on the repentance of the sinner. In answer to the question, which is naturally raised at this point, why God then sent His Son into the world to suffer and die, he says that God gave sinful men the supreme manifestation of His love in the sending of His Son, and particularly in the fact that the only begotten of the Father took our

human nature and persevered in instructing us both in word and deed even unto death. This manifestation of the great love of God tends to awaken a responsive love in the heart of the sinner and thus promotes true repentance and paves the way for the forgiveness of sins. Hence Abelard maintains that two benefits proceed from the passion of Christ, namely (1) the forgiveness of sins; and (2) the liberty of the sons of God, that is, a life of willing obedience to God. However, the order of the two is reversed in the logic of his scheme. In this scheme the main idea is not that of any satisfaction rendered to God, but that of a moral impression made on man.

View of Thomas Aquinas; Acceptilation Theory of Duns Scotus.

In the period immediately following the days of Anselm and Abelard such theologians as Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventura, Hugo of St. Victor, Peter the Lombard, Alexander, and others, usually sought to combine elements of both the Anselmian and the Abelardian theory. This is true also of Thomas Aquinas, the great master of Roman Catholic theology. In view of the fact that God might have allowed fallen man to die in his sins, he denies the absolute necessity of the atonement, though he regarded it as a fitting way of redemption. At the same time he admitted that it was possible to speak of the atonement as necessary, because God decided not only to save man but also that adequate satisfaction should be made. Christ offered a sufficient and even a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of mankind, and that satisfaction is reckoned to those who believe in virtue of their mystical union with Christ. Duns Scotus went far beyond Thomas Aquinas in denying the necessity of the atonement. He saw no need for it whatever and ascribed it simply to the arbitrary will of God. Had God so willed, an angel or a sinless man might also have wrought redemption for mankind. He also denied the infinite value of the atonement of Christ and maintained that God graciously accepted it as sufficient for the sin of man. Hence his theory is called the Acceptation or Acceptilation Theory of the atonement.

## The Reformers and the Penal Substitutionary Theory

In a general way the teachings of the Reformers are in line with those of Anselm. Like him, they have a judicial conception of the atonement and regard it as a satisfaction rendered to God, whereby He is reconciled to man, and which issues in the forgiveness of sins and in the renewal of life. Yet the Reformers differ from Anselm in some important particulars. They do not speak of an absolute, but rather of a hypothetical necessity of the atonement in virtue of the divine decree. This does not mean, however, that they are in agreement with Duns Scotus, for they do not recognize an arbitrary will in God, but only a will that is determined by all His perfections. In distinction from Anselm they assert that Christ rendered satisfaction to the justice rather than to the honor of God, and rendered this by His active as well as by His passive obedience or, to use a more common expression, by His life as well as by His death. Moreover, they recognize the penal character of the sufferings and death of Christ, and do not regard these, after the fashion of Anselm, as a gift of infinite value given to God. And, finally, they improve upon the Anselmian conception of the manner in which the blessings of Christ are communicated to the sinner. They point out that the merits of Christ are imparted to believers through the mystical union and are appropriated by faith. The views of the Reformers became the official doctrine of the Churches of the Reformation, which is found in all the great historic Creeds.

### Socinian Theory of Example.

While the Reformation led to the final formulation of the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, Humanism gave birth to the Socinian Example Theory, which is quite the opposite, bears the earmarks of several ancient heresies, and shows special affinity with the critical position of Duns Scotus and his school. Socinus denies the necessity of giving satisfaction for sin. There is no such righteousness inherent in the very nature of God as would make it imperative. God exercises both punitive justice and forgiving mercy

at will, without any inner constraint. He cannot exercise both at the same time, however, so that, when man transgressed the law, He could either punish him or show him mercy, but could not do both. If He punished sin in Christ, it cannot be said that He forgives sin; and if He forgives sin, it cannot be said that He punished it in Christ. Socinus believes that God freely forgives sin, and therefore denies that Christ rendered satisfaction for sin. The great significance of the work of Christ lies in this that He gave us a perfect revelation of the will of God, by His example pointed out the way of a real obedience that issues in life, and Himself by His perfect obedience obtained the power to give eternal life to sinners. This theory is constructed on Pelagian principles, contains no objective element whatever, and stresses the redeeming power of the life rather than of the death of Christ. In fact, it fails completely to give a convincing statement of the redemptive significance of the Savior's death.

#### The Governmental Theory of Grotius.

Grotius, the noted Holland jurist, undertook to defend the orthodox faith over against Socinus, but succeeded only in steering a middle course between the position of the Reformers and the Socinian theory. He finds the fundamental error of this theory in the fact that it represents God not only as a sovereign Lord, but also as an offended Party or as a Creditor, and maintains that it is only proper to regard Him as the supreme Governor of the world. And when this supreme Ruler of the universe punishes sin, He does it not in virtue of His inherent righteousness or natural law, but by reason of a positive law, which is the effect of His will, and is therefore mutable. Such a positive law is dispensable just because it depends on the will of the lawgiver. While it is only just that the transgression of such a law should be punished, this is not an absolute requirement of judicial rectitude. The law can be relaxed and the penalty remitted, if this should prove to be in the interest of the moral government of the world. And this is exactly what happened in the case under consideration. Yet the punishment was

not simply cancelled since Christ was punished for man's sins. Grotius speaks of Christ as making 'some payment' rather than full satisfaction. Nevertheless he occasionally speaks of Christ as making satisfaction, though this idea scarcely fits in his system of thought. God punished sin in Christ, in order to show His hatred of sin. The purpose was not to satisfy justice, but to deter men from sin, and thus to secure the interests of the moral government of the world. Some writers, such as Dale, Miley, and Creighton, aver that this theory maintains the objective nature of the atonement, but this is hardly correct, since it finds the purpose of the work of Christ, not in the satisfaction of justice, but in its deterring influence on men.

#### Arminian View of the Atonement.

Though Grotius belonged to the Arminian party, it cannot be said that the Arminians of his day adopted his theory in toto. They agree with him that there is no principle of justice in God which makes the execution of the threatened penalty absolutely imperative, and maintain that the Ruler of the universe is free to substitute something else for the penalty. At the same time they do not regard the sufferings and death of Christ merely as a penal example, but as in some measure a sacrifice which was not a complete satisfaction for sin, but a mere substitution for the penalty, involving a relaxation of the law. Like the Old Testament sacrifices it was merely the *conditio sine qua non* (the indispensable condition) rather than the ground of the forgiveness of sins. Another important point on which they differ from the Reformers pertains to the extent of the atonement. They believe that the atonement in Christ was intended, not only for the elect, but for every individual of the human race.

The Penal Substitutionary View of the atonement was incorporated in the great historic Confessions of both the Lutheran and the Calvinistic Churches, and was strongly defended by many prominent theologians. On this point Quenstedt and Turretin joined

hands, as did the Angelicans Hooker and Pearson and the great Puritan, John Owen. Baxter, however, favored the Governmental Theory of Grotius. This theory also became the New England doctrine of the atonement. For a long time theologians simply rehearsed the various theories that were developed in the past.

### Schleiermacher's Mystical Theory.

In Schleiermacher, however, we meet with a new view, which has since been called the Mystical Theory of the atonement. This great theologian, frequently called "the father of modern theology," rejects the doctrine of penal satisfaction through the sufferings and death of Christ, and substitutes for it a theory of atonement by incarnation. He finds the essence of religion in feeling, more specifically, in man's sense of the presence of God within him, or his God-consciousness. This God-consciousness is intended to permeate and control the lower consciousness of man, but is constantly oppressed and thwarted in its development by the lower consciousness. Left to himself, man cannot overcome this opposition. It is exactly at this point that Jesus comes to man's assistance. He is the ideal or archetypal man, in whom the God-consciousness controlled the lower consciousness from the start. He is really a new creation, but yet a true man. He enters the human race and becomes a new leaven in humanity. By his personal influence, exercised through the historical channel of the Church. He liberates the Godconsciousness of those who join the Church from the domination of the lower consciousness and thus makes them like Himself. In a mystical way He transforms and saves men. This thoroughly subjective theory reminds one somewhat of the views expressed by Irenaeus and Athanasius among the early Church Fathers. Edward Irving, the great English preacher, advocated a similar view; but while Schleiermacher regarded Jesus as sinless from the very beginning of his life, Irving held that Jesus had to purge his own human nature from sin first before He could influence the lives of others.

## Campbell's Theory of Vicarious Repentance.

Another theory which represents a new central idea is that of McLeod Campbell. This Scottish theologian had great respect for the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, but regarded it as deficient in that it was too legal and did not sufficiently reflect the love of God. He found his real cue, so it seems, in an admission of Edwards that perfect repentance on the part of man would have availed as an atonement, if man had only been capable of it, which he was not. Hence he promptly made repentance the central element in the atonement. He maintains that Christ offered to God, in behalf of humanity, the requisite repentance, and thus fulfilled the condition of forgiveness. So the central element in the work of Christ really consisted in a vicarious confession of sins on behalf of man. This naturally leads to the question how the sufferings and death of Christ are related to this vicarious confession. And the answer is that by His sufferings and death Christ entered sympathetically into the Father's condemnation of sin, revealed the heinousness of sin, and thus condemned sin. They stamped His confession as a genuine confession, involving a true conception of sin. Hence His confession was accepted by the Father as a perfect confession of our sins. Moreover, this condemnation of sin in the cross of Christ is calculated to produce in man that holiness which is demanded by God.

No modern theory of the atonement.

We might consider the views of other, more recent, writers on the atonement, but do not deem it necessary for our purpose. Fundamentally, the conceptions of the atonement found in such writers as Bushnell, Ritschl, Moberly, Denney, Stevens, Rauschenbusch, Smith, Harnack, Gladden, Shailer Mathews, and others, can all be arranged under the old categories. They do not really add a new type to the already existing theories, but merely give new and sometimes suggestive representations of those discussed in the

preceding. Dr. Warfield is entirely correct when he says that there is really no such thing as a modern theory of the atonement.

## **The Historical Occasion For the Atonement**

IT is generally admitted that the historical occasion for the atonement lies in the entrance of the disturbing factor of sin into the world, and in the resulting separation between man and his God. Without it an atonement would not only have been unnecessary but also impossible. Every theory of the atonement, from the Ransom-to-Satan down to the Example Theory or the most liberal construction of the Moral Influence Theory, proceeds on the assumption of a baneful separation between man and God.

Conception of sin determines view of atonement.

This does not mean, however, that every one of the theories advocated presupposes the same conception of sin. The Anselmian theory of the atonement could not have been constructed on the basis of the Pelagian view of sin, nor the Abelardian theory on the basis of the Augustinian doctrine of sin. Just as a doctor's diagnosis of a disease determines what medicines he will prescribe to check and counteract its ravages, so a theologian's conception of sin will have a determining influence on his view of the redemptive work of God in Christ. At the present time there is a general departure from the Augustinian view of sin. The prevalent conception of it is fundamentally either Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. Moxon judges that the statement that "we are all Semi-Pelagians today" is not very far from the truth, "since it is in close harmony with the tendencies of modern thought." *The Doctrine of Sin*, P. 13. As a matter of fact,

however, some have gone way beyond Semi-Pelagianism and outstripped even Pelagius himself in their volatilization of the concept of sin. And this is one of the reasons why the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement finds so little favor in modern theology.

Naturally, we cannot discuss the doctrine of sin in all its details in this brief treatise on the atonement. The most that can be attempted here is a concise statement of the salient points of the Scriptural teachings on sin, particularly in so far as they bear on the construction of the doctrine of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It is certain that, whatever auxiliary service science may render in the study of the subject, the Bible only can give us absolutely reliable information respecting the origin of sin in the human race, the universality of sin, its real nature, and its terrible consequences. Several points deserve special emphasis.

Sin has a voluntary origin; Denial of voluntary origin of sin.

Sin has a voluntary origin in the human race, and can only be regarded as a wilful departure from God. This must be maintained in opposition to all those systems of thought, from the ancient dualism of the Greeks down to the modern evolutionary theory, which represent it as a necessary evil. In ancient philosophical dualism the principle of evil is represented as eternal. Leibnitz views sin as something that is unavoidable, since it is the inevitable result of the necessary limitation of finite beings. Hegel looks upon it as something that is not absolutely evil but relatively good, and as marking a necessary step in man's transition from a state of innocence to a state of virtue. Without sin man could not have developed into a moral being. This is entirely in line with the theory of evolution, which also makes sin a necessary step in the cosmic process, an imperfection which man is bound to outgrow in course of time. Tennant indeed seeks to combine this view with the idea that sin has a voluntary origin, but his attempt cannot be called successful, since he does not explain how the theory of evolution

can allow for any such thing as a free will in man. Moxon is also of the opinion that in a modern theory of sin the idea that sin is the result of man's unfettered choice must be made to harmonize with the evolutionary view of man, and seeks to do this in some such way as was indicated by Tennant. It would seem, however, that Harnack had every reason to think, as he did, that these two opposing points of view cannot be reconciled.

### Scriptural view of the voluntary origin of sin.

If sin is a necessary evil and therefore has no moral quality, and may even be a step in the right direction, a "quest for God," as J. R. Campbell once called it, it is hard to see how it would necessarily call for atonement. The Bible gives us an entirely different view of sin, representing it as wilful disobedience, as a voluntary departure from God, and therefore as ethical evil. Adam was tested by the probationary command and failed to stand the test. By eating of the forbidden fruit he clearly showed that he was not minded to subject his will to the will of God. He disobeyed and fell, and was held directly responsible for his fall. As a result of his disobedience human nature was corrupted and man became a slave of sin. But even in the resulting slavery he sins, not under compulsion, but voluntarily and is held responsible for his sinful actions. The Bible testifies to this on every page in recording the punishments meted out to sinners, so that it may be regarded as superfluous to refer to particular passages. These teachings of Scripture are confirmed by the testimony of conscience as it passes a judgment of condemnation on the evil works of man. And this testimony of conscience is universal. It found philosophical expression in Kant's view of the categorical imperative. This philosopher recognized a radical (root) evil in man and maintained its moral character, but found himself unable to give a rational explanation of its origin. If he had been willing to accept it, he might have found the solution of the problem in the Word of God.

### Loss of the sense of sin.

Sin is not merely something negative, an imperfection in human life, but a positive transgression of the law of God which renders man liable to punishment. Sin is first of all guilt, and only secondarily pollution. It is a sad fact, and a fact to which both orthodox and liberal scholars testify, that people have to an alarming degree lost the sense of sin. Some Modernists, however, hasten to assure us that the loss is not without its compensations. While people have ceased to think about sin in the abstract, they have learned to fix their minds very definitely on sins in the concrete; while they have lost the sense of sin (sin as a unit, original sin), they have gained the sense of sins (sinful deeds, actual sins). But these sins, as they see it, are merely individual aberrations, which should be dealt with separately by the alienist, the psychologist, or the sociologist, as the case may be. The fact that sin is a unity, a dominating power in human life, is largely ignored by ever increasing numbers. They are willing to admit that man frequently, and in some cases habitually, sins, but fail to see that he is in a sinful state. This means that they do not believe in original sin, but only in actual sins which result from the deliberate choice of the individual will. Hence they deny that sin can ever be dealt with as a unity and always harp on the cure of individual and concrete sins. They are like the doctor who fights the symptoms of a disease and forgets all about the underlying cause, the disease itself. If their view is correct, and there is no solidarity of sin, it is hard to see how the Scriptural doctrine of the atonement can ever be maintained.

### Social interpretation of sin.

But the denial goes even farther than that and repudiates the historical conception of sin as a transgression of the moral law. The Church has always insisted on defining sin with reference to God and His law, but modern theology stresses the necessity of interpreting it socially. The idea of man's relation to whatever kind of a God there may be is indeed sometimes introduced, but usually as an afterthought. Sin is sensuality, or selfishness, or failure to live

up to the law of one's being or up to one's social obligations, or simply abnormal action, and so on,—and as such is, of course, also sin against God, the immanent God, our higher self, or "the stream of tendency by which all things strive to fulfil the law of their being." The nature of sin as guilt is generally soft-pedaled or denied. Modern writers most confidently assure us that there is and can be no such thing as original guilt. The idea expressed in the New England Primer,

"In Adam's fall

We sinned all,"

is regarded as pure fiction. Men cannot be held responsible for the sin of the first man, but only for their own personal transgressions. Many even deny that man is responsible for his own personal sins, since these are the result of his inherited animalism or of the evil environment in which he lives. Some maintain, however, that he is guilty in so far as he disregards the moral sense at its present stage of development and does not make his life subservient to the ethical and social ends of the Kingdom of God. But even so they do not always admit that man's actual sins are transgressions of the moral law and therefore render him liable to the positive legal penalty of the law. Some of them do not recognize the moral law as an absolute standard, and deny that sin is dereliction or the neglect of some duty which one is legally bound to perform. Sin is not guilt in the sense of liability to punishment. And if this is true, then a substitutionary atonement is naturally out of the question, for inherent guiltiness or misbehavior cannot be transferred from one person to another.

Scripture view of sin as liability to punishment.

In opposition to modern theology it should be maintained that sin is guilt in the specific sense of the word, as liability to legal punishment. It can be removed only by bearing the penalty which

the law has affixed to sin. This is clearly the doctrine of Scripture. Jehovah spoke to man, when He placed him in the garden of Eden: "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen. 2:17. Sin is regarded as guilt, exposing man to a legal penalty. Man sinned and death entered the world of humanity: "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned," Rom. 5:12. This does not mean that death came as the natural result of sin, but in virtue of the righteous judgment of God, cf. verses 16, 18. And when Paul says in Rom. 6:23, "The wages of sin is death," he does not mean that sin naturally kills man, but that it brings him under a sentence of death. This is perfectly clear from the connection. John says, "Every one that doeth sin doeth also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness," 1 John 3:4, which clearly shows that he contemplates sin in its relation to the law. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that Scripture often uses the word "sin" by metonymy for actual guilt or liability to punishment. Thus the prophet Jeremiah, after taking the people to task for their sins and predicting that Jehovah will deliver His people, says, "In those days and at that time, saith Jehovah, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found." Does this mean that the people will then be sinless? Of course not; it simply means that their sins will not be reckoned to them any more, as the Lord Himself says, "for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant," Jer. 50:20. Other passages may be referred to in which the Lord speaks of not imputing sin. The poet sings in the 32nd psalm, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity," Ps. 32:1, 2. And Paul says that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses," 2 Cor. 5:19.

Sin brings man under condemnation; Punishment not merely the natural result of sin.

Sin brings man under a sentence of condemnation. After what was said in the preceding it would hardly seem necessary to stress this point, were it not that some are so eager to divest the doctrine of sin of all forensic or legal elements that they deny the existence of any punishment of sin, except the consequences that naturally result from sinful actions. This view is held by New England Universalists and Unitarians, such as J. F. Clarke, Thayer, and Williamson, and also by some recent Modernists. They insist that there is an organic connection between sin and the evil results that naturally follow from it. Justice is simply the operation of the divine law by which sin becomes its own punishment. Washington Gladden says: "The penalty of sin, as the new theology teaches, consists in the natural consequences of sin.... In the first place the man who indulges in this selfish disposition (sin is regarded as selfishness, L. B.), will find it strengthening its hold upon him; that is a law of mind, and it works itself out in his experience ... There are also social consequences, of vast importance, on which I cannot dwell.... It is generally assumed that pain or suffering of some kind is the penalty of sin. It often brings sufferings as its consequence, but that is not always true, and it is by no means the worst consequence of sin.... There is, indeed, one natural consequence of sin, of which most of us have some knowledge. That is remorse, the rankling memory of the wrong committed ... And if this is the penalty of sin you will see, of course, that it cannot be borne by anyone in your stead." Present Day Theology, pp. 79–81. If this theory is correct, sin can never be removed by forgiveness, but only by an ethical process. Past sins, of course, remain what they are, and the penalty of sin can only be removed by removing sin itself. Its advocates fly in the face of many passages of Scripture, when they deny that God is ever angry with man, and does not visit judicial punishment upon him, 2 Kings 17:18; Ps. 2:12; Micah 5:15. Can the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt be regarded as the natural consequence of her sin; the destruction of the cities of the plain as the natural result of the wickedness of their inhabitants, or the ruin visited upon the company of Korah as the natural outcome of their insurrection? Was it to be expected in view of their respective sins that Gehazi

should become leprous, Herod should be eaten by worms, and Elymas, the sorcerer, should be struck with physical blindness? And do not the following passages clearly teach that God brings direct punishments upon the wicked? Ps. 11:6; 75:8; 78:49; 89:32; Prov. 21:12; 24:20; Isa. 1:24, 28; Matt. 3:10; 24:51. Moreover, according to this theory many who are innocent are punished along with the wicked, though they have committed no sin from which the punishment naturally results; and the respectable sinner, who feels remorse for his sin, receives greater punishment than the hardened criminal, who has no pangs of conscience.

There can be no doubt about it that, according to Scripture, sin brings man under a sentence of condemnation, makes him the object of God's wrath, and renders him liable to judicial punishment. It is, of course, true that there are evil consequences of sin, which can be called punishments in a general and rather loose sense of the word. They are not limited to the guilty parties and are by no means always commensurate with the transgressions. The Bible speaks of men, however, as being by nature under condemnation and as "children of wrath," and speaks of God as a "God that will by no means clear the guilty."

## **The Necessity of the Atonement**

The necessity of the atonement in early history.

NOW the question arises, whether the atonement was necessary or might have been dispensed with entirely. Was it a necessary prerequisite for the work of reconciliation and redemption, or could God have redeemed man irrespective of any real atonement? On this point there has been considerable difference of opinion since the days of Anselm. This Church Father himself stressed the absolute necessity of the atonement, and based it primarily on the

honor of God, though not entirely without taking God's justice into consideration also. His great opponent, Abelard, on the other hand, asserted that God could have granted pardon irrespective of any punishment for sin. Several later Scholastics shared the views of Anselm, but presented them with less consistency. Thomas Aquinas in a certain sense denied the absolute necessity of the atonement, but regarded this method of redemption as the best means to give expression at once to both the mercy and the righteousness of God. Duns Scotus went far beyond St. Thomas in his negations. He held that, just as the work of redemption in general was not necessary but contingent, the atonement too was simply dependent on the arbitrary will of God. There is nothing in the nature of God that calls for atonement.

The Reformers on the necessity of the atonement.

Respecting the opinion of the Reformers on this matter there is considerable difference of opinion. Ritschl says that they made it their aim to deduce the absolute unavoidable necessity of Christ's satisfaction from that moral order of the universe, which is *solidaire* with the essential will of God." Dr. Orr follows Ritschl on this point in his *Progress of Dogma*, p. 237. But this assertion, which might apply to the great Protestant theologians of the seventeenth century, is too sweeping, if not incorrect, with respect to the Reformers, though it may seem to be warranted by some of their statements. Principal Franks appears to be closer to the truth, when he says that Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all avoided the Anselmian doctrine of the absolute necessity of the atonement and ascribed to it only a relative or hypothetical necessity based on the sovereign free will of God or, in other words, on the divine decree. This opinion is shared by Seeberg, Mozley, Stevens, Mackintosh, Bavinck, and others. This appears more clearly, however, in the works of Calvin than in those of Luther. It is frequently said that the influence of Duns Scotus on the Reformers appears at this point; but it would not be correct to assume that they conceived of the will of God as an arbitrary will, independent of His moral character.

They repudiated the idea that the will of God was determined by anything outside of Himself, but at the same time regarded it as acting, by virtue of an inner necessity, in harmony with His whole inner Being and with all His attributes. Confer especially Warfield's notes in his *Calvin and Calvinism*, pp. 155, 156.

But while the Reformers contended only for a "hypothetical necessity," as Turretin calls it, a necessity based on the divine decree, they regarded the method of reconciliation by atonement as the most suitable way, since it safeguards the justice and holiness of God. The great Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century did not hesitate to maintain the absolute necessity of the atonement and to ground it in the very Being of God. They regarded the law which man transgressed, not as a mere positive commandment dependent on the will of God, but as the immutable expression of the essential will of God; and conceived of God's punitive justice, not as an accidental, but as an essential quality of God by which He is constrained to inflict due punishment on evil-doers. Both Socinus and Grotius denied that there was anything in the nature of God which made the atonement necessary, while the Arminians were not entirely agreed on this point. The advocates of the so-called Moral Influence and Mystical Theories of the atonement deny the fact of an objective atonement, and therefore also by implication deny its necessity. With them atonement becomes merely at-one-ment or reconciliation effected by changing the moral condition of the sinner. Many feel that the stupendous fact that Christ died guarantees the moral necessity of what He undertook to do, but refuse to speak of legal necessity, or of "an antecedent necessity for suffering, leading up to a subsequent display of mercy."

Reformed theology on the necessity of the atonement.

While there are some Reformed theologians, such as Zanchius and Twisse, who follow Calvin in ascribing to the atonement only a hypothetical necessity, resulting from the divine decree to pardon

on no other condition, Reformed theology in general shows a decided preference for the other view. It regards the atonement as absolutely necessary, and grounds it particularly in the justice of God, that moral perfection of the divine Being, in virtue of which He necessarily maintains His holiness over against sin and the sinner and inflicts due punishment on transgressors. This is also the position of our Confessional Standards, Heidelberg Catechism, Question 40; and Canons of Dort II, Art. 1. It would seem to be the clear teaching of Scripture that God, in virtue of his divine righteousness and holiness, which can brook no sin and certainly cannot simply overlook defiance to His infinite majesty, must needs visit sin with punishment. Habakkuk addresses God with the following words: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness," Hab. 1:13. God hates sin with a divine hatred; His whole Being reacts against it, Ps. 5:4–6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18. Paul argues in Rom. 3:25, 26 that it was necessary that Christ should be offered as an atoning sacrifice for sin, in order that God might be just while justifying the sinner. The important thing was that the justice of God should be maintained. This clearly points to the fact that the necessity of the atonement follows from the divine nature. Moreover, it would seem to find an additional proof in the greatness of the sacrifice that was brought. God gave His only begotten Son for the sin of the world. Says Dr. Hodge: "This sacrifice would be most painfully irrelevant if it were anything short of absolutely necessary in relation to the end designed to be attained—that is, unless it be indeed the only possible means to the salvation of sinful men. God surely would not have made His Son a wanton sacrifice to a point of bare will." *Atonement*, p. 237. It is also worthy of notice that, according to the argument of Paul in Gal. 3:21, Christ would not have been sacrificed, if the law could have given life. "Nothing is easier," says Brunner, "than to caricature the statements of the Bible and of Christianity about the penal sufferings of Christ in such a way that behind these 'theories' we seem to perceive the figure of some bloodthirsty Oriental monarch, or of some primitive Eastern divinity, with his whims and caprices. But in reality the absolute sovereignty of God is the presupposition

of this revelation, and, wherever the idea of a 'democratic God' is entertained, there will be no intelligent understanding of the meaning of the Cross." *The Mediator*, p. 470.

Denial of this necessity involves a denial of the punitive justice of God.

They who deny the necessity of a penal substitutionary atonement, by implication also disown the strict punitive justice of God, in virtue of which He must necessarily punish sin. At a comparatively early stage in the history of doctrine they already felt the need of attacking or re-interpreting the usual conception of the justice of God. Socinus denied the existence of an inherent punitive justice in God and regarded it as a mere effect of God's will. Grotius affirmed its presence in God indeed, but denied that it necessarily calls for adequate penal satisfaction. The will of God, guided by wisdom, may intervene between the attribute of justice and its effects. The Arminians share this opinion. And in our day the opponents of the doctrine of penal satisfaction virtually take the same position, though they usually state it in a different way. It is very common among them to assume that love is the central and all-controlling perfection of God, and that His justice must be interpreted through His love. In other words, His love determines the measure in which He exercises justice. This is but another way of denying the inherent character and absoluteness of the justice of God. It makes the justice of God contingent on the divine love, and therefore on the divine will. Support for this view is sought in the scriptural statement that "God is love." But that this assertion does not mean that God is essentially only love is quite evident from the fact that the Bible also says, "God is light" and "our God is a consuming fire." Moreover, God could not be love in the absolute and true sense of the word, if He were not also just. His love would be like that of Eli for his wicked sons, and this love stands condemned on the pages of Holy Writ.

Objections to this necessity; God inferior to man.

A couple of objections call for brief consideration here. It is sometimes said that, according to this view of the atonement, God is really inferior to good men. These can and often do love and freely forgive those who wrong them, but God, on this view, cannot exercise love to the sinner before receiving satisfaction. But this objection fails to discern that God cannot simply be compared to a private individual, who can without injustice forget about his personal grievances. He is the Judge of all the earth, who in that capacity must maintain the law and exercise strict justice. A judge cannot simply ignore the law and acquit the culprit that is brought before him. No matter how generous he may be as a private individual, he must see to it that the law takes its course. Moreover, this objection also fails to take note of the fact that, when man had fallen in sin, it was neither metaphysically nor morally necessary that God should open up a way by which the sinner could escape from utter ruin. He was not constrained to devise and to put into execution a way of redemption. With perfect justice He could have left man to his self-chosen doom. He was under no obligation to save a single one. And the ground for His determination to redeem a goodly number of the fallen human race, and in them the race itself, can only be found in His own good pleasure. This love to the sinner was not awakened by any consideration of satisfaction, but was entirely sovereign and free. Scripture teaches us that they who are saved owe their salvation in the last analysis to the good pleasure of God. The Mediator Himself was a gift of the Father's love, a gift which naturally could not be contingent on the atonement. Moreover, God Himself wrought the atonement in Jesus Christ. It may be called a gift of God to man. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John 3:16. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:9, 10. "Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be

the glory forever and ever," Gal. 1:4, 5. "In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we should be to the praise of His glory," Eph. 1:11, 12.

Schism in the trinitarian life.

The first objection frequently goes hand in hand with a second which finds expression in the following words of David Smith: "It (the penal theory of satisfaction) places a gulf between God and Christ, representing God as the stern Judge who insisted on the execution of justice, and Christ as the pitiful Savior who interposed and satisfied His legal demand and appeased His righteous wrath. They are not one either in their attitudes toward sinners or in the parts which they play. God is propitiated, Christ propitiates; God inflicts the punishment, Christ suffers it; God exacts the debt, Christ pays it." *The Atonement in the Light of History and the Modern Spirit*, p. 106. This means that the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement involves a schism in the trinitarian life of God. But this objection is also based on a misunderstanding, for which the adherents of that doctrine may be partly to blame. They do not always sufficiently emphasize the truth to which attention was called in the preceding, that the whole work of the atonement originated in the good pleasure of God. Moreover, they frequently give the impression in their private conversation and in their public worship that Christ is the Alpha and Omega of the work of redemption. This tendency is very marked in the life and worship of the Moravian Brethren, but appears with almost equal strength and persistency in the religious attitude and exercises of many others, particularly in our country. Some of them are frankly and piously opposed to a theocentric and insist on a christocentric religion. While they sing the praises of Christ in one hymn after another, they seldom rise to the heights of recognizing the triune God for His eternal love and for His boundless grace. They stop at the mediate, and forget all about the ultimate cause of their salvation, and might profitably reflect on some of the Old Testament psalms, such as. Ps.

16, 18, 23, 27, 34, and on such New Testament passages as Luke. 1:47–50, 78; 2 Cor. 1:3; 4:15; Eph. 1:6; 2:4, and so on. The triune God provided freely for the salvation of sinners. There was nothing to constrain Him. The Father made the sacrifice of His Son, and the Son willingly offered Himself. There was no schism in the divine Being. The ultimate cause of the redemption of sinners lies, not in one person of the Trinity, but in the sovereign good pleasure of the triune God.

## **The Atonement in Relation to the Law of God**

Atonement legal; Denial of the legal element.

THE penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement proceeds on the assumption that sin is in its very nature a transgression of the law of God and thus renders man guilty. For that very reason the remedy proposed for it must be first of all a legal remedy. This point calls for particular attention because of its widespread denial. The forensic nature of the atonement finds no favor with the advocates of the Moral Influence, or of the Mystical Theory, because it does not fit in with their fundamental thought. According to Sabatier "the capital defect of the old theory lay in its legal character. The Christian thought of our time has, on the contrary, been constantly endeavoring to lift the doctrine of expiation from the forensic to the ethical point of view." *The Atonement in Modern Thought*, p. 213. Lyman Abbott makes the broad statement that "no theory of the atonement can be correct which represents it as a method of appeasing God's wrath, or satisfying His justice, or meeting the requirements of His law, or devised as a substitute for punishment due to infraction of that law." *Ibid*, p. 97 f. Stevens expresses the

opinion that even "the stoutest recent defender of substitution and propitiation will not allow that he holds any legal or forensic theory." *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 251. Moreover, says he, "Desert the strict penal equivalence theory of atonement (as he thinks every sensible man will naturally do), and you logically end in the moral theory." *Op. cit.*, p. 432.

Scripture teachings on man's relation to God.

When the Bible represents sin as a transgression of the law, as it repeatedly does, the idea is not that it is simply an infraction of some positive enactment of God, which served a merely temporary purpose and could be changed at any time. The law to which it refers is God's moral law, which is as to its essence grounded in the very nature of God, and is therefore necessary and immutable. It is a law which God cannot simply ignore or set aside at will, since it is the expression of His very Being. When God created moral beings, this law ipso facto (by that very fact) determined the relations in which they would stand to Him, and did not leave it to them to determine these for themselves. The duty of obedience was necessarily imposed on them. This is perfectly evident from the fact that Jesus represents the obligation to love the Lord with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the mind, and the neighbor as one's self, as the very essence of the law. To say that God might have required something essentially different or might have exacted less of his moral creatures, is to assume that He might have lost sight of the fact that He is the highest Good and that man is His image-bearer. The righteousness of God carries with it the assurance that His law is eternally right. The poet sings of it in the nineteenth psalm as "perfect," "right," and "pure." And Jesus testifies to the unchangeableness of the law, when He says: "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all things be accomplished." *Matt. 5:17, 18*. And, again: "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the

law to fall." Luke 16:17. The least element of the law has more reality and durability than the whole universe. The law is a transcript of the will of God for the regulation of the lives of His moral beings, and the will of God is not an arbitrary will, but a will which is determined by and is in perfect harmony with all the divine perfections. This truth is denied in the Governmental Theory of the atonement, for according to Grotius law is not something inherent in God, nor is it the will of God, but simply an effect of His will, a positive enactment, which is mutable and can be set aside. In all Moral Influence Theories the question of the law and its demands is practically ignored. All legal elements are taboo: God is not a stern Judge, but a loving Father, who deals gently with His erring children. If they have transgressed against Him, He is quite willing to forget about it, provided they turn to Him with penitent hearts. He will even heap coals of fire upon their head, in order to induce them to say, "I will arise and go to my Father."

A moral law carries with it a penal sanction.

Another point which requires special emphasis is that every law given for moral and responsible beings necessarily carries with it a penal sanction. Such a law calls for obedience and, in case of transgression, for the infliction of a penalty. The justice of God, which guarantees rich blessings to those who obey the law, necessarily inflicts due punishment on transgressors. Turretin correctly says: "If there be such an attribute as justice belonging to God, then sin must have its due, which is punishment." Atonement of Christ, p. 19. This means that the penalty of sin is something which of right and therefore necessarily follows transgression, and not something which God arbitrarily or with a view to some specific purpose attaches to infraction of the law. It is not inflicted because it may deter the sinner from further sins, or may be instrumental in reforming his character and habits, or may safeguard the interests of the moral government of God. The law requires that sin be punished because of its inherent demerit, irrespective of all further considerations. This principle applies not only in divine but also in

human law. Justice requires the punishment of the transgressor. It finds strong expression in the words of Creighton: "Once you admit the fact of a divine precept with its declaration of penalty, you bar the thought of pardon as logically and absolutely as the extinction of the sun, moon, and stars would, in thought, mantle the world in a midnight of death. If the precept is just and the penalty just, the intervention of a prerogative voiding its execution would be unjust. It would violate a principle, and that principle the basis of all law, human and divine; namely, the principle of justice. The serious words of Bishop Newman quoted at the head of this chapter deserve to be repeated and emphasized: 'There is no such thing as pardon in His government; when His law is violated suffering must be endured, either by the original offender or by an adequate substitute.' " Law and the Cross, p. 46. This principle is fundamental in all those passages of Scripture which speak of God as a righteous Judge, a Judge who renders unto every man according to his deserts. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings," Jer. 17:10; cf. also Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Isa. 59:18. "The soul that sinneth it shall die ... and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him," Ezek. 18:20. "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons," Col. 3:25.

No substitution for the Penalty.

The advocates of the Governmental Theory and the Arminians, who accept this theory in part, maintain that Christ did not really bear the penalty of sin, but something that was substituted for the penalty. Grotius regarded it as perfectly natural that the sinner should be punished for his sin, but did not consider it simply or universally necessary that he should be punished with such punishment as corresponded with his transgression. In his estimation the law was relaxable at this point and relaxation actually took place in the case of Christ. God graciously accepted something else in lieu of the penalty. And because Christ did not

bear the penalty of sin, it can hardly be said that his sufferings were penal, though Grotius sometimes speaks of them as such, and they are so regarded by the Arminians. While Reformed theologians reject the Grotian view as derogatory to the justice of God, they do not as a rule maintain that Christ suffered the identical penalty which sinners would have had to suffer as the punishment of their transgressions. This was quite out of the question, since it would have required as many lives in Christ as there are sinners for whom He atoned, and He would have had to bear some consequences of sin, such as spiritual death including remorse for sin, which He could not and did not experience. They hold that He bore a full equivalent in the strictly legal sense for the sins of His people. The substitution of a divine and all-perfect person for guilty sinners made a substitution within the penalty not only possible, but even necessary, for, as Dr. Hodge says: "The execution of precisely the same sufferings, if it had been possible, in the person of the God-man, that would have been the proper penalty of the law if executed in the persons of the transgressors themselves would have been an outrageous injustice." *The Atonement*, p. 66.

Impossible to set the law aside.

The Grotian theory of the atonement leads on to still another thought. According to the eminent Dutch jurist God might have set aside the law altogether and refrained from inflicting any punishment for sin; and the reason why He did not do this lay in the fact that this might endanger the interests of His moral government. God might have forgiven sin without any atonement whatsoever as far as the law was concerned. The Grotian conception of the law indeed allows of this possibility. But if the law is regarded as an expression of the moral character of God, and therefore as a necessary revelation of the will of God for the guidance of His moral creatures, it becomes utterly impossible to assume that the Judge of all the earth might have pardoned sin without any adequate atonement. Law, ideally considered, knows no pardon; pardon has no place in a perfect government, unless special provisions have

been made to secure it. Says Creighton: "His (God's) government is perfect, and in a perfect government, perfect in its constitution and perfect in its administration, pardon is impossible without an atonement." He anticipates that some of his readers will object to this by saying that "even civil governments make provision for pardons," and that certainly "the divine government is more merciful than the human." In answer to this objection, however, he goes on to show, by quoting several eminent jurists, that the prerogative of pardon lodged in various human officials is not based on mercy but on justice, and that "it is a corrective means of justice, and its utility would be lost but for the lack of justice somewhere in the course of law." This power of pardon therefore finds its justification only in the imperfection of the administration of human justice, and could have no place in a perfect judicial system. And because God's administration of justice is perfect, it has no place there. In the divine economy there is no place for pardon without atonement. Cf. Creighton, *Law and the Cross*, pp. 34–42; Armour, *Atonement and Law*, pp. 107–114.

## **The Atonement in Relation to The Covenant of Redemption**

Importance of stressing the connection.

IT is of the utmost importance and indeed quite essential that the doctrine of the atonement be considered in connection with other closely related doctrines. The common objection to the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement, that it is purely legal and has no ethical bearings, would hardly be raised, if it were clearly understood and acknowledged that the atonement effects reconciliation, and reconciliation, in turn, carries with it the

assurance of complete and perfect redemption. Again, the objection that God, according to this doctrine, inflicts the penalty of sin on the innocent while He permits the guilty to go free, loses a great deal of its point when the union between Christ and those whom the Father has given Him is clearly understood. The doctrine of the atonement is but a part of the whole scheme of redemption and should be studied as a part of this larger category. The Bible reveals the fact that God deals with man in a covenantal way and representatively, not only in the covenant of works but also in the covenant of grace. Legally He deals with the group as with a single person. Adam was the head of the human race, not only in a biological, but also in a legal sense. He represented all his descendants. When he sinned and thus contracted guilt, they all became guilty in him. Paul says: "Through one trespass the judgment came unto all men to condemnation," and, "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners," Rom. 5:18, 19. They did not become guilty in virtue of their biological descent from Adam, but only in virtue of the fact that he was their legal representative. Actual guilt (liability to punishment) is not an inherent quality but a relationship, and therefore cannot be passed on from one to another by inheritance but only by imputation. In virtue of man's failure to meet the requirements of the original covenant transaction we can now speak, not only of the sins of the individual descendants of Adam, but also of their corporate guilt. And it is exactly because sin entered the world through one man, and the guilt of sin therefore constitutes a unity, that it was possible to remove it by a single atoning sacrifice. And even so this could be done only on the basis of a union between the Redeemer and the subjects of redemption.

Union between Christ and His People necessary; Union with mankind by incarnation.

In order that Christ might be the Redeemer of His people, it was necessary that He should be one with them in some such representative sense as Adam was one with the human race. And

the Bible testifies to such oneness in several places. It even speaks of Christ as being one with men in more than one sense. In virtue of the incarnation He shares their human nature: "the Word became flesh." And this was absolutely essential to the work of redemption. The writer of Hebrews directs attention to this when he says: "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage," Heb. 2:14, 15. Since man sinned, man had to bear the penalty of sin. The idea that an angel might have done this, as Duns Scotus maintained, does not commend itself to human reason, and is also unscriptural. Paul says, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," 1 Cor. 15:21, 22. But the mere fact that the Son of God became man, and even proved to be a sinless man, however basic to the work of redemption, did not yet qualify Him to take the place of thousands of others and to effect their deliverance from the power of sin and death. In order to do that, He had to be a representative man, and the incarnation in itself did not make Him that any more than Adam's mere humanity ipso facto made him the representative of the human race.

The mystical union of Christ with believers.

There is another union of Christ with men which is very prominent in Scripture, a union of a more limited nature, namely, the spiritual oneness of Christ with His people, which is effected by the Holy Spirit, when He regenerates the sinner and endows him with the gift of faith and thus enables him to appropriate all the blessings of salvation that are in Christ. The mystical union thus established is a very important one and has always been regarded as the spiritual fountain of all blessings for believers. Calvin places it very much in the foreground, in order to give due prominence to the idea that believers receive all their riches only out of and in living

relationship with Jesus Christ. In the economy of redemption it was the Father's will that all the fulness of grace and truth should dwell in Christ, and that believers should daily draw on Him for spiritual sustenance, for knowledge and wisdom, for life and light, for strength and courage, for all the Christian graces, and for the hope of immortality. "For it was the Father's good pleasure," says Paul, "that in Him should all the fulness dwell," Col. 1:19. And John completes the thought when he says, "For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace," John 1:16. The same thought finds expression in Eph. 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." The closeness of this union is clearly indicated in the words of Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me," Gal. 2:20. The apostle is so deeply impressed with the fruitfulness and blessedness of this union that the phrase "in Christ" is one of the outstanding characteristics of his writings. But even this union, however important, does not suffice to explain the possibility of the atonement by Christ. It is itself the fruit of His atoning work, and serves to mediate the application of His merits. It is not the legal union that was required, in order that Christ might undertake and effect the redemption of sinners.

Legal union of Christ with His people.

We are in search of still another union, a union which affords a real legal basis for the atonement, a union rooted in a transaction which makes Christ the legal representative, not of all men, but of all those whom the Father has given Him. Without such a union He could never have served as their substitute; their sins could never have been imputed to Him, nor His righteousness to them. This fundamental and absolutely essential union was established in the covenant of redemption, the eternal basis and prototype of the covenant of grace. In this eternal covenant between the Father and

the Son the latter voluntarily takes the place of the elect sinner, assumes his guilt and undertakes to bear the penalty of sin and to merit everlasting life for His own; and the Father pledges to qualify Him for His great task by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and to grant Him the fruits of the travail of His soul in a redeemed humanity. There are abundant evidences of such a voluntary transaction between the Father and the Son. That Christ as the representative of His people was one of the parties in a covenant with the Father follows from the parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Rom. 5: through the one came sin and through the other grace; through the one condemnation and through the other justification. Jesus speaks repeatedly of a task which the Father has given Him to do, and stresses the fact that He came, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him, John 5:30, 36; 6:38; 7:28, 29; and Psalm 40:7, 8 testifies to His readiness to do the Father's will in bringing a sacrifice more real than those of the Old Testament. He speaks of having accomplished the work which the Father has given Him to do, and on that basis claims His reward, John 17:4, 5. He makes mention of those whom the Father has given Him and now expects, on the basis of the effected agreement, that they shall be glorified, John 17:24. Moreover, He even refers to a Kingdom which the Father has appointed (literally, "covenanted") unto Him, Luke 22:29. And it is only in view of the fact that there is not only a vital, but also a legal union between Christ and believers or all those who constitute the new humanity, that Paul can equate Adam and Christ, as he does when he says, "For since by one man came death (and death is not merely the result, but the wages of sin), by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," 1 Cor. 15:21, 22; and again, "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. 5:19. This also explains how he could say, "Him who knew no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," 2 Cor. 5:21.

It should be noted that in the covenant of redemption Christ became the legal representative, not of all men, as Adam was, but only of those whom the Father gave unto Him. These are variously designated as "the children whom God hath given" Him, Heb. 2:13, "the seed of Abraham," v. 16, and "His brethren," v. 17. Only for them does He intercede, John 17:9, and only for them does He claim the reward, v. 24. If this limitation of the covenant had always been borne in mind, there would have been little need of discussing the extent of the atonement. It would have been understood at once that Christ undertook and finished His atoning work for a limited number, namely, for those who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, Eph. 1:4.

## **The Atonement and the Priestly Work of Christ**

The offices of Christ.

THE atonement should also be studied in connection with the priestly office of Jesus Christ. While it is perfectly true that the Mediator functions in the work of redemption, not only as priest, but also as prophet and king; in His atoning work He stands out pre-eminently as the great High Priest. In modern liberal theology the doctrine of the offices of Christ does not meet with great favor. As a matter of fact it is often conspicuous by its absence. And if it is still mentioned, it is usually for the purpose of pointing out that the work of Christ cannot properly be subsumed under the three offices of Christ, since it is a unity and cannot be distributed in that fashion. Moreover, the terms "prophet," "priest," and "king," as applied to Christ, are often regarded only as so many figurative descriptions of the different aspects of the work of Christ. Christ is not considered to be a real prophet, a real priest, and a real king. It is no wonder therefore that many modern works on the atonement

are silent about the priestly office of Christ. The modern spirit is quite averse to the official Christ, but greatly in love with the self-denying and self-sacrificing Jesus. And even so it does not stress His priestly but rather His prophetic work.

It should be emphasized at the outset that, according to Scripture, Jesus is a real priest. As over against the priests of the Old Testament, who were merely shadows and types, He may be called the only real priest. He was revealed among men as the truth (i. e. the reality) of all the shadows of the Old Testament, and therefore also of the Old Testament priesthood. He is priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and the superiority of this order, as compared with that of Aaron, is clearly brought out in the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is a mistake to think that He is a priest only in the sense in which devotees of art and literature are sometimes called priests. This is after all a very incorrect and entirely unwarranted use of the term "priest." The Bible never employs it in such an arbitrary way. When Jehovah swore, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," He constituted the Messiah a real priest.

The nature of the priestly office.

And if we desire to get an idea of the nature of the priestly office, we can do no better than to turn to Heb. 5:1, where we read: "For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that He may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins." This passage contains a rather complete description of the nature of the priestly work. Several elements are indicated here.

The priest taken from among men, appointed for men.

It should be noted first of all that the priest is taken from among men. This is of the greatest importance and may even be called absolutely essential, since he must act in a representative capacity. It is often correctly said that, while the prophet comes to men as the

representative of God, the priest draws near unto God as the representative of men. The priest had to be taken from among men because his services symbolized the truth of man's making atonement for sin, and because he typified the man Christ Jesus in His atoning work. Christ could not have served as our great High Priest, if He had not Himself been man. Some wrongly claim that this truth is contradicted by Heb. 7:28. The high priest is appointed for men, that is, in the interest or for the benefit of men. And he has his appointment from God. This is not expressed in the passage under consideration, but is clearly stated in the fourth verse, "And no man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron." Dr. Martin in his excellent work on *The Atonement* would seem to be putting an undue strain on the plural "men" when he infers from its use that the work of the priest, and by implication also the work of Christ, is personal right from the start, that is, seeks to promote the spiritual interests of certain definite persons, and not of mankind in general. However true this thought may be in itself—and it finds abundant warrant in Scripture —, it can hardly be based on this passage in a way that carries conviction. The plural is in all probability simply used to make it correspond to the preceding plural, "being taken from among men, is appointed for men." Dr. Martin seems to be interested in finding the thought here that Christ performed His work for the benefit of a certain specific number of men. But it should be borne in mind that the author of Hebrews does not directly speak of Christ until he comes to the fifth verse. However, the passage does clearly teach by implication that Christ was divinely appointed for the performance of an official task, a thought that is distasteful to modern liberal theology.

#### Work of the Priest before God.

The priest is appointed for men in things pertaining to God. He is to represent men before God. Whatever business they have with God, he must transact, cf. also 2:17. The business which he is called upon to transact before God is described in the epexegetical statement

"that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins," cf. also 7:27; 8:3; 9:9; 10:10. The same thought is expressed in Heb. 2:17 in the following words, "to make propitiation for the sins of the people." On the basis of these passages we may say that it was the task of the priest to offer up sacrifices for the purpose of propitiation. This does not mean that it was his function to change the disposition of God by offering expiatory sacrifices—an idea prominent in pagan religions—for the divine disposition in itself does not admit of change; but rather that it was his official task to ward off the divine displeasure by interposing the sacrificial blood between God and the sinner as a covering for sin. This establishes the important point that the work of the priest has primarily a God-ward reference, a point which is utterly ignored and implicitly denied by all subjective theories of atonement. The advocates of these theories not only ignore the objective reference of the atonement of Christ, but as a rule positively repudiate the idea that He presented Himself to God as a sacrifice of expiation or atonement. The remarks of Dr. Martin on the use of the plural rather than the singular in the expression "for sins" seem to us rather irrelevant, especially in view of the fact that the author of Hebrews does not hesitate to use the singular "sin" exactly where he speaks of the sacrifice of Christ, 9:26. Notice also that John the Baptist introduces Jesus as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world," John 1:29. Sin manifests itself in a multiplicity of sins, and did this especially for the consciousness of the Old Testament priests, with whom the writer is comparing Christ, since they were generally bringing sacrifices for particular sins.

#### Personal reference of the work of Christ.

While the thought that the work of the Old Testament priests, and therefore also the work of Christ, had a personal reference and effected atonement only for certain definite persons, or for a definite group and not for all mankind, can hardly be based on the plurals "men" and "sins" in Heb. 5:1, it is nevertheless a scriptural idea. The Old Testament priests in the great majority of cases

offered sacrifices for certain specific persons. In some cases they did it for the priesthood or for the nation of Israel as a whole, but never for all men or all mankind. Sacrifices were brought for the nation in its theocratic character as symbolizing and typifying the true people of God. It is significant that they could not be brought for the sins of individuals who in effect terminated their relationship to the theocracy. In the New Testament the sacrifice of Christ is represented throughout in relation to the Church. He died sacrificially for many, Isa. 53:11, 12; Matt. 20:28; 26:28; Heb. 2:10; 9:28, for His people, Matt. 1:21; Tit. 2:14, for his sheep, John 10:11, 15 (cf. 26–29); Heb. 13:20, for His brethren, Heb. 2:11, for the children of God, John 11:52; Heb. 2:13–15, for His Church, Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25, or for us as believers, Rom. 5:9; 8:32; 1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:19; Rev. 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10. This means that Christ in performing his sacrificial work had certain definite persons in mind right from the beginning. This is the rock on which all other theories of the atonement suffer shipwreck. Their advocates do indeed admit that the atonement of Christ results in the salvation of only a limited number of persons, but deny that the salvation of those persons only was intended by Christ from the start.

Christ active in His sufferings.

The fact that Christ was not merely a sacrifice, but also functioned as priest gives due prominence to another important truth, namely, that he was active in His sufferings. He was not an unwilling victim of circumstances, such as the evil environment in which He moved or the wicked plottings of the Jews, but deliberately gave Himself to bitter sufferings and a shameful death. He was the great High Priest who brought the supreme sacrifice, which was adumbrated by all the sacrifices of the Old Testament. On more than one occasion He made it perfectly clear that He might have escaped, if He had so desired. It is generally admitted, of course, that Christ was active during His life, but the point that is frequently missed, if not explicitly denied, is that He was active as priest in offering a

sacrifice on the altar of God, active especially in the supreme moment when He laid down His life for sinners. He was active on the cross just as the Old Testament high priest was active on the great Day of Atonement in bringing the special sin-offerings for the people. If He was not active at that moment when He completed His sacrificial work by laying down His life, then He failed at the crucial point. But in the light of Scripture there can be no doubt about it that He was active even in His death. We are told that "He poured out His soul unto death," Isa. 53:12, and that "He loved the Church and gave Himself for it," Eph. 5:25; Gal. 2:20. In Eph. 5:2 Paul makes the significant statement that "Christ gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell." As the good Shepherd He laid down His life for the sheep and He made it abundantly clear that this was his deed by saying: "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." John 10:17, 18. Here the power to lay down His life is equated with the power exerted in the resurrection. This truth deserves special emphasis at the present time in view of the widespread tendency to regard Christ as exclusively passive in His death, a victim of adverse circumstances. All Example and Moral Influence Theories, as well as modern liberal theology in general, find the value of His atoning work in His life rather than in His death. They can hardly interpret His death otherwise than as the death of a martyr to a worthy cause. Shailer Mathews speak of Jesus as the innocent victim of maladjustment, and says: "The tragedy of His execution is all the darker since He was a victim of religious idealism and political order." *The Atonement and the Social Process*, p. 199.

The Sacrifice of Christ prefigured.

Finally, it also deserves attention that the sacrifice of Christ as the great High Priest was prefigured in the old dispensation. The points to be noted particularly are that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were piacular or expiatory, vicarious, and typical in character. A

great many scholars under the influence of the Graf-Wellhausen school deny their penal and substitutionary character. Some are willing to admit that this character was sometimes ascribed to them during the period of the Old Testament, though at a comparatively late date, but claim that there is no warrant for this in the Old Testament itself. Stevens says: "We must conclude, therefore, that whatever may have been the popular interpretation of Jewish sacrifice, neither its original nor its intended and prevailing meaning was penal or substitutionary." *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 14. He admits that it is not easy to give a simple and clear answer to the question, "What was the object of the sin-offerings if not penal satisfaction?"

Theories respecting the O. T. sacrifices.

Various theories have been broached as to the fundamental character of the Old Testament sacrifices. It has been suggested (1) that they were gifts to please the deity, to express gratitude, or to placate the wrath of the divine being; (2) that they were essentially sacrificial meals, expressive of communion between the deity and man; (3) that they were divinely appointed means whereby the heinousness of sin should be confessed and attested; or (4) that, in so far as they embodied the idea of substitution, they were merely symbolical expressions of the fact that God accepts the sinner, in lieu of actual obedience, in the sacrifice which expresses his desire to obey and his longing for salvation. The advocates of the Governmental and Moral Influence Theories of the atonement usually resort to some such explanation of the Old Testament sacrifices as indicated under (3) and (4). We cannot enter upon a discussion of these various views here, but can only give our reasons for maintaining that the Old Testament sacrifices contained an expiatory element, which was most prominent in the sin-and trespass-offerings, but was also present in burnt-and peace-offerings; that as expiatory sacrifices they were vicarious or substitutionary; and that they typified and therefore pointed forward to the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Mosaic sacrifices were Piacular.

The pre-Mosaic sacrifices may be left out of consideration here, though there are reasons to believe that they too were of a piacular character, cf. Gen. 8:20, 21; Job 1:5; 42:7–9. It appears that all the Mosaic sacrifices, burnt-and peace-offerings as well as sin-and trespass offerings, contained an expiatory element, Lev. 4:13–20; 7:7; 1:3, 4; 3:1, 2; 23:27, 28; Num. 28:22. The expiatory character of these sacrifices has been denied, but these denials have been met with cogent arguments time and again. The following particulars point to the propitiatory and substitutionary character of these sacrifices: (1) The animals that were chosen for offerings were those which stood nearest to man and could therefore best serve as substitutes. (2) They had to be without blemish, that is, perfect in their kind to symbolize the fact that only a sinless one could take the place of the sinner, 1 Peter 1:19. (3) The offerer had to confess his sins in the presence of this sacrifice, and then lay his hands upon its head in token of the transference of his sins to the offering. (4) The offering was actually slain, as we are repeatedly told, for the purpose of making atonement for the offerer. (5) Time and again we are assured that the sacrifice effects the pardoning of the offerer's sin. If all these things were taken into consideration and given due weight, it would hardly seem possible that anyone should deny the expiatory and vicarious nature of these sacrifices. The services on the great Day of Atonement were particularly instructive. Two goats were brought for a special sin-offering: the one had to be slain and its blood sprinkled on and before the mercy-seat, to "make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins"; and the other had to be "sent into the wilderness; and ... bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land." Lev. 16:16, 21, 22.

Sacrifices for moral offenses.

Some have maintained that in the Mosaic dispensation sacrifices were not brought for moral offenses at all, but only for ceremonial

transgressions or for sins of ignorance to which no moral character could attach. Now it is quite true that the external sacrifices as such affected only the ceremonial standing of the Israelites; but even breaches of the ceremonial law might very well involve moral turpitude, to judge by the state of mind which they indicated. Moreover, the so-called sins of ignorance not only included sins that were done from want of knowledge, but also unintentional sins and sins that resulted from weakness or carelessness; and such ignorance, weakness, or carelessness might certainly be criminal. Notice that offerings were required in cases of theft and were permitted in some cases of fornication. Moreover, on the great Day of Atonement sin-offerings were brought for all the sins of the people. It is true, however, that there were certain offenses for which no sacrifice could atone even in the ceremonial sense. Sins committed with a high hand (intentional sins) were to be punished by death, since they were regarded as capital offenses against the state or against the moral order of society. Ceremonial restoration and cutting off from the people could not go hand in hand. Naturally, this does not mean that these sins could not be forgiven by God.

Mosaic sacrifices not spiritually efficacious.

The point that deserves special emphasis is that the Mosaic sacrifices were not in themselves efficacious to expiate moral transgressions. They were not the real sacrifice that could atone for moral guilt and remove moral pollution, but only shadows of the coming reality. Speaking of the tabernacle, the writer of Hebrews says: "Which is a figure for the time present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshiper perfect." Heb. 9:9. He points to the shadowy character of the law when he says: "For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things, can never with the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect them that draw nigh." 10:1. And again, he speaks of the ineffectual character of the Old Testament sacrifices,

saying: "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins," 10:4. The reason for all this is not that God did not appoint them for that end, but rather that they were not fit to serve that purpose. Various reasons can be given for this: (1) They did not properly express the greatness of God's displeasure against sin, and thus failed to reveal the exceeding sinfulness of sin. (2) They bore no proper relation to man either in point of nature or of legal obligation: they could not serve as his proper substitutes, because they were far inferior to man and were not under the law which he had broken. (3) They were not sufficient to maintain the inviolable rectitude of the moral law, which demands the death of the sinner, and cannot be satisfied with the death of an animal instead. (4) Their value was not at all proportionate to the life that had been forfeited, the life of a rational, moral, and immortal being. The only thing in which these sacrifices, as such, were effectual, was in the symbolical restoration of the sinner to his outward place and privileges in the commonwealth of Israel.

#### O. T. Sacrifices typical of the sacrifice of Christ.

But what was said does not exhaust the meaning of the Old Testament sacrifices. Some regard ceremonial restoration as the only purpose which they served, but this can hardly be called a scriptural view. According to the Bible they were designed to prefigure, to typify, the vicarious sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. The connection between them and Christ is already indicated in the Old Testament. "Sacrifice and offering thou hast no delight in: Mine eyes hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart," Ps. 40:6–8. In these words the Messiah Himself substitutes His great sacrifice for the purely shadowy sacrifices of the Old Testament, cf. Heb. 10:5–9. In the New Testament there are numerous indications of the fact that the Mosaic sacrifices were typical of the more excellent sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He is said to have offered Himself to God, and to have borne the sins of many

and even of the world. He is called the Lamb of God, a lamb without blemish and without spot, the passover that was slain for us. And because the Mosaic sacrifices were typical, they naturally shed some light on the nature of the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## **The Objective Nature of the Atonement**

The atonement objective.

ONE of the most important points of dispute between the advocates of the Penal Substitutionary Doctrine of the atonement and the adherents of nearly all other theories, is that of the objective nature of the atonement. The question in dispute is whether the atonement in itself, as distinguished from reconciliation, has a Godward or a manward reference, whether it is made to God or to man, and whether it affects primarily the relation of God to the sinner, or exclusively the relation of the sinner to God. The Penal Substitutionary Theory holds that the atonement in itself is brought to bear on God and on God only, though the resulting reconciliation has a double aspect. Dr. Shedd expresses it in the following words: "An atonement makes its primary impression upon the party to whom it is made, not upon the party by whom it is made. When a man does wrong to a fellow man, and renders satisfaction for this wrong, this satisfaction is intended to influence the object, not the subject; to produce an effect upon the man who has suffered the wrong, not the man who did the wrong. Subjective atonement is a contradiction. Atoning one's self is like lifting one's self." Dogm. Theol. II, p. 393. If a man does wrong and renders satisfaction for it, he renders satisfaction, not to himself, but to the party whom he has wronged. This would seem to be a self-evident truth. In the case under consideration it means that the atonement in Christ is

rendered to God, and that consequently God is propitiated or reconciled to the sinner. This is undoubtedly the primary idea of the atonement through Christ. It may even be said that the atonement as such has only an objective reference, the sinner giving satisfaction to God in the Mediator, Jesus Christ; though its results are both objective and subjective: God is reconciled to the sinner, and the sinner is also reconciled to God. The reconciliation of God to the sinner is primary, and that of the sinner to God is secondary.

Denial of the objective nature of the atonement.

This objective nature of the atonement has met with widespread denial. Socinus regarded it as absurd to think that satisfaction was rendered to God, since this would mean that God in Christ satisfies Himself. Grotius, in his attempt to refute the Socinian theory, spoke indeed of satisfaction but without doing justice to the idea, since he conceived of the death of Christ merely as a penal example, which God required in order to honor the law, while yet forgiving the sinner. Naturally, the Unitarians, which may be called the present day Socinians, share the negative position of the latter. Says Emerson: "To him (the Unitarian) there is no such thing as a God angry with the race of beings which He has created and needing therefore to be reconciled with them by some act of propitiation or of expiation." Unitarian Thought, p. 184. The English divines, J. Taylor, H. Taylor, and A. A. Sykes, took the same position. Archbishop Magee quotes passages from H. Taylor and Sykes which clearly prove this. Taylor avers that "God is never said to be reconciled to the world, because He was never at enmity with it. It was the world that was at enmity with God, and was to be reconciled by coming to the knowledge of His goodness to them." And Sykes says, "There could be no need of reconciling God to man, when He has already shown His love to man so far, as to send His Son to reconcile man to God." Cf. Magee, Discourses and Dissertations on the Scriptural Doctrines of Atonement and Sacrifice, Dissertation No. XX. Dr. Stevens repudiates "the idea of a propitiation or placation of God's wrath in the sufferings of Christ, the removal of

hindrances to forgiveness by His sufferings, the substitution of His death for the penalty of sin, and the accomplishment of an "objective" satisfaction of any kind wrought upon Him ab extra." *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 432. And Dr. David Smith chimes in with this when he says: "The theory (of penal substitution) represents Christ as 'reconciling God to sinners'; and this is precisely the reverse of the New Testament representation. 'Reconciliation' is a Pauline term, and, with a persistence and precision which evince conscious and deliberate intention, the apostle constantly affirms that Christ 'reconciled the world to God,' never that He 'reconciled God to the world.' This is the *usus loquendi*, and it is invariably observed." *The Atonement in the Light of History and of the Modern Spirit*, p. 111.

The opponents' view of the atonement.

But if these men and many others like them deny the objective nature of the atonement, just what is their conception of the atoning work of Christ? How do they conceive of the atonement? While they all agree that the atonement affects man's attitude to God rather than God's attitude to man, and that it has no other effect than that of changing man from an enemy to a friend of God, they do not all conceive of it in exactly the same way. Some maintain that Christ rendered to God a sacrifice consisting in perfect obedience to the will of God, and that this sacrifice was so well pleasing to God that He thought fit to grant man, on account of it, the forgiveness of sins and other spiritual benefits. The benefits procured by Christ for us really constitute the atonement. Bushnell's view is that Christ in His sacrificial life represents and manifests the age-long suffering of God on account of the sin of man, and thus exercises a profound moral and regenerating influence on man, resulting in a spiritual change. David Smith, a Scottish Presbyterian divine of whose work Dr. Faulkner says that "It is 'modern' with a vengeance," and Washington Gladden practically take the same view. Unitarians generally find the atoning work of Christ in the revelation of the fact that God is always our

merciful and forgiving Father, who is ready to forgive and heal the truly penitent. One and all deny that there is anything in God that calls for propitiation. Brunner sums up the subjective view of the atonement in the following words: "Man, quite wrongly, regards God as an enemy, as a Judge who wishes to punish him. At the cross man becomes aware of his error; here the idea that God is love conquers the idea of His anger. Thus here the only gulf which separates man from God is illusory, namely, it is that which human error has placed between itself and God. Reconciliation simply means the removal of a religious error." *The Mediator*, p. 439.

Is god angry with the sinner?

In view of this fact it is well to face the question first of all, whether Scripture justifies the view that God is angry with the sinner, or that the sinner is the object of His righteous wrath. It would seem that even a cursory reading of the Bible is quite sufficient to warrant an affirmative answer. There are so many clear indications of this in the Bible that it would be wearisome to quote all the relevant passages, but it may be well to refer to a few. "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity," Ps. 5:5. "God is a righteous Judge, yea, a God that hath indignation every day," Ps. 7:11. "Jehovah is a jealous God and avengeth: Jehovah avengeth and is full of wrath; Jehovah taketh vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies," Nah. 1:2. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. 1:18. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasureth up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works," Rom. 2:5, 6. "If so be that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you," 2 Thess. 1:6. "For if we wilfully sin after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries," Heb. 10:26, 27. These passages, to which many others could easily be added, would seem to be quite

sufficient to establish the truth that God regards the sinner with holy indignation and will not simply overlook evil. Our God is a consuming fire for the sinner, Heb. 12:29. Since God is clearly represented in Scripture as the offended party, it is but natural that atonement should be offered, that amends should be made, to Him. This is the only proper sense in which we can speak of atonement. They who deny the Godward reference and still continue to speak of atonement through Christ usually insist on it that atonement really means nothing more than at-one-ment. This is a mere play upon words to make it appear that the doctrine of the atonement is retained when it is in fact discarded.

### The work of the priests objective

Several considerations may serve to substantiate the objective nature of the atonement. The fundamental character of the priesthood and its work clearly point in that direction. Both prophets and priests stood between God and man, but with a characteristic difference. The prophets represented God in bringing a message to man, and therefore looked from God in a manward direction; while the priests represented man in the presence of God, and as such moved in a Godward direction. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews expresses it thus: "For every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God." 5:1. Since this passage was already discussed in the preceding, it is not necessary to enlarge on the various elements which it contains. Suffice it to say that it gives a clear indication of the fact that the work of the priest looks primarily to God. Of course, this does not exclude the idea that the priestly work may also have a reflex influence on man.

### The sacrifices objective in reference.

This argument is augmented by a consideration of the Old Testament sacrifices. Sacrifices have an objective reference. It is a generally recognized fact that among the Gentiles they were

brought, not to man, but to the gods. They were supposed to produce an effect on the gods and to render them propitious. The Scriptural idea of sacrifice agrees with that among the Gentiles in this objective reference. Lyman Abbott contradicts this when he says: "In the Christian conception sacrifice is wholly an expression of divine love; it is wholly self-sacrifice, and its object is to impart life by God the Life-giver to man the perishing." And again: "That sacrifice proceeds from God to man, not from man to God, is implied even in the Levitical code." *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, p. 94, 95. This is a fanciful idea which he fails to prove. He merely intimates that in the institution of the sacrifice God Himself approaches man and points out the way in which the broken covenant could be restored; that the value of the sacrifice was not in any imagined effect on God, but in its efficacy as an expression of the mind and heart of the worshiper; and that the idea of self-sacrifice on the part of God for man is quite explicit in the teachings of Isaiah concerning the suffering Servant of Jehovah. Now it is perfectly true that, according to the law of Moses, God Himself approaches the sinner in mercy and provides in the sacrifices the ways and means of reconciliation. Man did not invent this way himself. He even received the animals for the sacrifices from the hand of God. It is also true that the sacrifices did not, strictly speaking, effect a change in God, as supposed in the heathen religions; and that they served, at least in part, to express the religious attitude of the offerer. And it is equally true that God provided the supreme sacrifice in the suffering Servant of Jehovah. But all this does not disprove the objective reference of the Old Testament sacrifices. Though they could only be brought because God provided them, and though this provision already testifies to the fact that God was disposed to forgive the sinner, they were nevertheless sacrifices which man brought to God, and not vice versa. The writer of Hebrews says that the things pertaining to God consisted in "offering both gifts and sacrifices for sins." And according to the Old Testament they were not mere expressions of devotion and gratitude, but served to atone for sin, Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35. The friends of Job are enjoined to bring sacrifices, "lest," says the Lord,

"I deal with you after your folly," Job. 42:8. These sacrifices, it is true, did not bring about a change in Him who is the Unchangeable One, but did interpose something between Him and the sinner or sin, so that the wrath of God was warded off from the transgressor.

Meaning of Hebrew and Greek terms.

The Hebrew word for "to atone" (KIPPER) points in the same direction. It expresses the idea of atonement for sin by covering sin or the sinner. The blood of the sacrifice is interposed between God and the sinner, so that the wrath of God terminates on it and not on the guilty party. It has the effect therefore of warding off the wrath of God from the sinner. In the Septuagint and in the New Testament two Greek terms are used in a related sense (HILASKOMAI and HILASMOS). In classical Greek the verb means "to render propitious," "to propitiate," and the noun "a propitiation" or "appeasing," or "the means of propitiation." As a rendering of the Hebrew word (KIPPER) the verb may mean "to propitiate," "to expiate," or "to atone," and the noun may be rendered "propitiation," "expiation," or "atonement." They are terms of an objective character. In classical Greek they are often construed with God as the object. There is no example of this in the New Testament, but this does not prove the idea unbiblical. There are but four passages in the New Testament where the one or the other of these words is found. The most important of these are the following three: Heb. 2:17, "Wherefore it behooved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for (Moffat, 'to expiate') the sins of the people." This passage is best explained in the light of the Hebrew word as meaning to expiate or to make atonement for the sins of the people. 1 John 2:2, "And he is the propitiation for our sins"; and 4:10, "And sent His Son to be propitiation for our sins. These can be explained in the same way as the preceding passage, or with God as the object understood.

Interpretation of Matt. 5:23, 24; Interpretation of Rom. 5:10.

Other Greek words are the terms rendered "to reconcile" or "reconciliation" in the New Testament (KATALASSO and KATALAGE). The words denote a change from enmity to friendship, and certainly have first of all an objective reference. In the discussion of these words we must take special notice of the assertion, often made with the greatest confidence, that the Bible never says that God is reconciled to us by the death of His Son, but always that we are reconciled to God. This assertion is based in a rather superficial way on single expressions of the Bible, and does not give evidence of close attention to the context. Each one of the following passages contain either the noun or the verb with respect to God: Rom. 5:10, 11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 22. Of these the first and the third may be regarded as the most important. Now the opponents of an objective atonement maintain that, according to these passages, the enmity is all on one side, namely, on the side of man, and that man must therefore be reconciled to God. He must lay aside his enmity against God, his hostile disposition. It is undoubtedly true that God requires this of sinners, but it is not correct to say that this constitutes the essence of their reconciliation. We have the key to the interpretation of the expression "to reconcile one's self to someone" in Matt. 5:23, 24, where the word now under consideration is used: "If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Here the offender is told to be reconciled to the offended party, something which he can only do, not by laying aside his own hostility (which probably does not exist and certainly is not mentioned here), but by honoring the just demands of the brother whom he has offended. Being reconciled to the brother is equivalent to seeking restoration into his favor by pacifying him. It implies that the offended person looks with disfavor on the offender. This thought should guide us in the interpretation of Rom. 5:10, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." The immediate connection speaks of being saved from the

wrath of God. Then the passage itself contains the statement that Paul and the readers were reconciled to God, while they were yet enemies, that is, while they were still the objects of God's wrath, not through their change of disposition, but through the death of Christ. And by being reconciled they ceased to be the objects of divine wrath. Hence the reconciliation is spoken of in the following verse as something objective which they have received.

Interpretation of 2 Cor. 5:18–20.

A similar interpretation should also be given of 2 Cor. 5:18–20, "But all things are of God, who reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God." In this passage we are told that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not by prompting the men of the world to lay aside their wickedness, but by not reckoning unto them their trespasses, by forgiving their sins, by turning aside His anger and restoring them to favor. Through the sacrifice of Christ His relationship to the subjects of redemption was changed. And now the preachers of the gospel are commissioned to offer this reconciliation, this restoration to divine favor to men, and to exhort them to accept the favor which is so graciously offered them. And when they do this, they also by the grace of God lay aside their own hostility to God. The reception of the objective reconciliation given in Christ is naturally accompanied by a subjective change on the part of the recipients. This may be called the subjective side of the reconciliation. Reconciliation is not only objective but also subjective.

Finally, the term "ransom" points in the same direction. Christ is the Goel, the liberator of sinners, Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23. He redeems sinners from the demands of God's retributive justice. The

price is paid by the sinner, in the person of his representative, to God. In view of all that was said it would seem that we are abundantly justified in speaking of the objective character of the atonement.

## **The Vicarious Nature of the Atonement**

Christ our Vicar.

WHEN we speak of the vicarious nature of the atonement, we mean that Christ in his atoning work took the place of the sinner and as his vicar or substitute bore the penalty of sin and met the requirements of the covenant of works. This statement should not be toned down to mean that the self-sacrifice of Christ was merely a necessary prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins arbitrarily fixed by God; or was a mere substitute for a penalty; or was simply a sacrifice in behalf of the sinner, or consisted only in the sufferings which He bore as the result of his identification with the human race. Arminians speak of the sacrifice of Christ as vicarious in view of the fact that in a certain sense He was punished in our stead, but do not believe that He bore the full equivalent of the penalty which was our due. His sacrifice was not a plenary satisfaction for sin, but merely the condition of forgiveness, since in the divine economy there is no forgiveness apart from the shedding of blood. The demand of the law was not fully met therefore in the sacrifice of Christ. On this point Grotius was quite in agreement with the general Arminian position. While he ostensibly put up a defense of the orthodox doctrine of satisfaction, he failed to meet the main contention of the Socinians, that Christ did not really pay the penalty of sin. While he spoke of the death of Christ as a satisfaction, he ascribed to it only the significance of a penal

example ordained by God, in order that He might appear as honoring the law, while yet pardoning sinners. This penal example is what he means by satisfaction. Even Schleiermacher is willing to speak of the sufferings of Christ as vicarious. Christ was sinless, and yet by entering into the common life of sinful humanity suffered vicariously for others, even for the sin of humanity as a whole. Ritschl considers the doctrine of vicarious punishment as utterly indefensible. The idea is completely out of harmony with his system of thought. There are other advocates of the Moral Influence Theory, however, who continue to speak of the sufferings of Christ as vicarious. Bushnell even sent his work into the world under the caption "Vicarious Sacrifice." He finds the principle of vicarious sacrifice in love, which is essentially vicarious. That Christ vicariously bore our sins, means that He "bore them on His feeling, became inserted into their bad lot by His sympathy as a friend, yielded up Himself and His life, even, to an effort of restoring mercy; in a word, that He bore our sins in just the same sense that he bore our sicknesses." *Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 46.

### Meaning of "vicarious."

It is quite evident that in all these cases the word "vicarious" is used in a rather loose sense. The word is derived from "vicar," which in general denotes a substitute, one who takes the place of another, acting or suffering in his stead. In the Roman Catholic Churches a vicar is one who represents a clergyman of higher rank and as such acts representatively in doing what his superior would otherwise do. The substitutionary idea is essential to it. The fact that one acts or suffers in the interest of another, or does and suffers in part what was incumbent on the other, does not make one a true vicar and does not render one's action or suffering vicarious. When we speak of the sacrifice of Christ as vicarious, we use the term in its proper sense. We mean that Christ as our substitute suffered the punishment due to us, and in our place met all the requirements of the law. We affirm that the satisfaction made by Christ was strictly penal and met all the claims of divine justice, and deny that it was

merely a nominal satisfaction which, through the mere indulgence of God, was accepted as payment in full.

The laying on of hands.

Since many deny that the sacrifice of Christ was substitutionary or vicarious, it becomes imperative to examine the Scripture proof for this doctrine. We direct attention first of all to the fact that the vicarious nature of the sacrifice of Christ was clearly symbolized and typified in the Old Testament sacrifices. When an Israelite brought a sacrifice to the temple, he put his hand on the head of the sacrifice. The injunction pertaining to this matter is found in the very beginning of the book of Leviticus: "And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him." Lev. 1:4. Cave and others regard this merely as a symbol of dedication, but this hardly explains why the sacrifice was in virtue of it fit to make atonement for the offerer. Surely, a thing that is dedicated to God is not by that token rendered suitable to make atonement. Moreover, the ceremony of the scapegoat on the great Day of Atonement, as recorded in Lev. 16:20–22, seems to point in another direction. We read there as follows: "And when he (the high priest) hath made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the tent of meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a man, that is in readiness into the wilderness; and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a solitary land; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." This passage is so clear that comment would seem to be unnecessary. Cave objects, however, that this is not a true analogy to the sacrifices that were brought upon the altar, and that "before 'this undoubted act of the transference of guilt,' the hand of the priest had already been laid upon the head of the slaughtered goat." If the sins of the people had already been transferred to the goat

that was slain, how could they be transferred once more to the living goat? He seems to forget that the special sacrifice on the Day of Atonement was the culmination of the whole sacrificial ritual, and as such was the most expressive symbol of the work of atonement. The two goats really constituted a single sacrifice with a double aspect, symbolizing at once the punishment of sin and its removal from the land. Moreover, it is perfectly fair to argue that, if the laying on of hands had that significance in the case of the living goat, it had the same significance in connection with other sacrifices. Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 129 note; Magee, *Atonement and Sacrifice*, Diss. No. XXXIX; Vos, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 124.

The slaying of the animal.

The following point to which attention should be called is the slaying of the animal. Of this Dr. Vos says: "In connection with the laying on of hands transmitting sin the slaying of the sin-bearing animal could scarcely have any other purpose than to signify that death is the penalty of sin, vicariously inflicted in sacrifice." *Op. cit.*, p. 125. This is most clearly indicated in the classical passage that is found in Lev. 17:11: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life." It is quite generally admitted that this is the clearest expression of the vicarious import of the Old Testament sacrifices that can be found anywhere in the Old Testament. It virtually amounts to the statement that one life is given for another life. Life is surrendered in the blood that is poured out in death and applied to the horns of the altar or presented before God in the inner sanctuary; and this has the effect of atoning for the sins of those who bring the sacrifice. "The sacrificial animal," says Dr. Vos, "in its death takes the place of the death due to the offerer. It is forfeit for forfeit."

Scripture passages.

In addition to the proof derived from the sacrificial ritual of the Old Testament there are several classes of passages which point to the vicarious nature of the atonement. There are many passages which teach that our sins were laid upon Christ, and that He bore our sins or iniquities, Isa. 53:6, 12; John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24. Our sins are laid upon Christ, so that He is taking our place as sin-bearer. This does not mean that our sinfulness was transferred to Him—something that is quite impossible—but that, as already explained in the preceding, the guilt of our sin was imputed to Him. He was made liable to punishment in our stead. To say that He bore our sins is equivalent to saying that He bore their punishment, and that He removed them by suffering for them. This is quite evident from Isa. 53 and from Heb. 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18.

Meaning of two Greek prepositions.

Moreover, there are passages which clearly state that Christ died or laid down His life for us. In some of these the substitutionary idea is clearly present. We cannot simply argue from the Greek prepositions (ANTI and HUPER) used in such cases, for while one of these may mean "instead of," it does not always have that meaning; and while the other really means "in behalf of," it may in some instances also express the idea of substitution. The exact force of the preposition will have to be determined largely by the context. It is interesting to notice that, according to Deissmann, several instances have been found of the use of that preposition which really means "in behalf of" with the meaning "as representative of," *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 153. We find a similar use of it in Philem. 13. There are several passages in the New Testament, in which it most likely means "instead of," but where it is possible to stop short of this meaning and to render it "in behalf of," such as Rom. 5:6–8; 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:9. But there are also cases in which any other meaning than "instead of" would seem to be excluded and in which, as Robertson says, only violence to the text can get rid of it. He mentions as such Gal. 2:13; John 11:50; and 2 Cor. 5:15. The other preposition (ANTI) is clearly used in the sense

of "instead of" in Matt. 2:22 and 5:38; 20:28; Mark 10:45. Of the last two passages Robertson says: "These important doctrinal passages teach the substitutionary conception of Christ's death, not because ANTI of itself means 'instead of,' which is not true, but because the context renders any other resultant idea out of the question." Grammer, p. 573. The same idea is expressed in 1 Tim. 2:6 where, as the same author says, "both ANTI and HUPER combine with LUTRON (ransom) in expressing this idea."

Furthermore, we should bear in mind that, if reconciliation could be brought about and sins could be forgiven only on the basis of an atonement, and if it was God's will that reconciliation should be effected and sins should be pardoned, the very nature of the case would call for a vicarious atonement. The only alternative to this would be a personal atonement, and this was entirely out of the question in the case of the sinner. The sinner is represented in Scripture as so depraved that he is totally unable to do any spiritual good and to pave in any sense of the word the way by which he might be re-instated in the favor of God. In a sense he can, and remaining in his sins, certainly will atone for them by suffering the pains of hell eternally, but this is a kind of atonement that is never completed and will never issue in redemption. For that reason it may be said that, if the opponents of a substitutionary atonement succeed in proving to their own satisfaction that Christ did not vicariously atone for sin by His supreme self-sacrifice, they have also with the same cogency established the fact that they and all other men will have to suffer eternal perdition.

Objections to vicarious atonement; Cases of pecuniary debt.

Several objections are raised, however, against the doctrine of vicarious atonement. The most general objection is that justice, as it is represented by the law, does not admit of any such thing as vicarious suffering or vicarious satisfaction in penal matters. It is generally admitted that in cases of pecuniary debt payment by a substitute is not only permissible, but must be accepted and ipso

facto cancels all further obligation on the part of the original debtor. Pecuniary debt, it is said, is not so personal that it cannot be transferred. In such a case there is no claim on the person of the debtor, but only on his property. It should not be forgotten, however, that pecuniary debt may involve personal guilt; the debt may be the result of carelessness and even of positive fraud. Yet payment by a substitute is permitted and must be accepted. In some cases it is simply demanded of the substitute. A person may borrow money on a promissory note which some responsible person signs for him. If he cannot pay the note at the proper time and cannot get it renewed, his surety is under obligation to pay for him.

Other cases of substitution.

But this is not the only case in which substitution is admitted by law. J. M. Armourx in his work on Atonement and Law has a chapter under the caption. "Substitution Normal in Law," in which he mentions, in addition to the case of a pecuniary debt, three kinds of cases in which the law has provided for and admitted substitution. To quote: "1st. Work for the public benefit, required by law, of able and qualified citizens within the limits of a certain age, may be performed by any substitute who is free from like obligation, willing and able.—2. By universal consent even military service required for the defense of the country, may be rendered by any substitute who is himself free from the same obligation, who is, for any reason, willing and ready to act as a substitute and is able to perform the service required. Such substitute entering the ranks, should he fall in the first engagement, nothing more is required of him in whose behalf he enlisted. 'His labors, his dangers, his wounds, his death, are vicarious.' and do fully satisfy the requirements of law, as law has in all ages been understood and administered by men.—3. Even in the case of crime, law, as understood and administered by men in all lands, provides that the penalty may be met by a substitute, in all cases in which the penalty prescribed is such that a substitute may meet it consistently with the obligations he is already under," p. 129. It is perfectly evident

that the law does recognize the principle of substitution, though it may not be easy to cite instances in which innocent persons were permitted to act as substitutes for criminals and to bear the penalties imposed on these. As a rule this finds a sufficient explanation in the fact that it is usually impossible to find men who meet all the requirements for such substitution. Such a substitute must not himself stand in a penal relationship to the law. His taking the place of another may not result in hardships and deprivations for other innocent persons. He must be under no compulsion whatever, but assume the burden of guilt voluntarily; and must, in addition, be able to give some assurance that the criminal will retain a deep consciousness of his guilt, of the fact that he deserved what the substitute is suffering for him, and of the necessity of mending his ways. And in cases of capital punishment he should be satisfied that he has the right to dispose of his own life. It is possible that no man could ever meet these requirements; but this is no proof that Jesus Christ could not meet them. In fact, He could and did, and therefore was an acceptable substitute. This will appear, if we add to what was said a few remarks in connection with some of the specific objections which are included in the general objection just considered.

The innocent suffering for the guilt of the wicked.

The general objection discussed in the preceding is sometimes stated so inaccurately as to make it appear even more untenable. It is sometimes said that, according to the doctrine of vicarious atonement, the innocent is made to suffer the consequences of the guilt of the wicked. But it will readily be seen that this really constitutes an objection against the moral government of God in general. There is abundant evidence that in actual life the innocent often suffer as a result of the transgressions of others. In a melee an innocent bystander is shot down; the family of a drunkard suffers want; and neglected children suffer from the delinquencies of their parents. Moreover, in this form the objection would hold against all other so-called theories of atonement, for they all represent the

sufferings of Christ as being in some sense the result of the sins of mankind. The Sinless One suffers for the sins of others and for their benefit. Again, the statement is sometimes made that a moral agent cannot become reasonably responsible for any sin, except by doing it personally. But this is also contradicted by the facts of life. If a number of men hire an assassin to murder a person, they are all held responsible for the crime. The crimes of John Dillenger and his gang were also visited upon the persons who helped them on their way, who dressed their wounds, and who gave them shelter.

Injustice on the part of the Father.

It is sometimes said that the doctrine of vicarious atonement involves an injustice on the part of the Father in that He simply sacrifices His Son for the sins of mankind. "How cruel and unjust it appears," says Abelard, "that anyone should demand the blood of the innocent as any kind of ransom, or be in any way delighted with the death of the innocent, let alone that God should find the death of His Son so acceptable, that through it He should be reconciled to the world." Quoted by Franks, *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ*, I. p. 188. This objection loses sight of several pertinent facts. It was not the Father but the triune God that conceived the plan of redemption. There was a solemn agreement between the three Persons in the Godhead. And in this plan the Son voluntarily undertook to bear the penalty of sin and to give complete satisfaction to the Father. Says He, "Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O my God." Ps. 40:7, 8; and again, "I lay down my life.... No one taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself," John 10:17, 18. And not only that, but the sacrificial work of Christ also resulted in immense gain for Himself and in the enhancement of His mediatorial glory. It meant a numerous seed, loving worship, and a glorious kingdom. Moreover, this objection is somewhat of a boomerang, for it returns with a vengeance on the head of Abelard and on all those who adopt a theory of the atonement which denies its necessity, for they are all agreed that the Father sent His Son into the world for bitter

suffering and a shameful death which, while beneficial, was yet unnecessary. This was cruel indeed.

Union between Christ and sinners.

Again, it is sometimes said that it is not conceivable that the vicar should remove the guilt of an offender, unless there is some real union between them which would justify such a procedure. The general truth of this may be admitted, but it should be noted that provision was made for this in the plan of redemption. In the depths of eternity the Mediator of the new covenant freely undertook to be the representative of His people. A federal relationship was established in virtue of which He became the representative of all those whom the Father had given Him. And on the basis of this a mystical union was formed, ideally in the counsel of peace, to be realized in the course of history in the union of Christ and His Church. Christ could become the legal representative of His own, and being mystically one with them, He could also convey to them the blessings of salvation.

Ethical bearing of the atonement.

This also indicates the answer that can be given to another objection that is sometimes raised against the doctrine of vicarious atonement, namely, that such an atonement is purely legal and has no ethical bearings; that it merely makes provision for a change in the sinner's legal relationship to the law and to God, and fails to provide for a change in his ethical and spiritual condition. It is true that the atonement as such does not effect a spiritual change in the sinner; but it is also true that it furnishes the only sound basis for his spiritual renewal. It results in a reconciliation which is both objective and subjective. By the grace of God the atoned sinner appropriates the reconciliation which is in Christ Jesus and receives the Spirit of adoption. This Spirit so operates in his heart that he is renewed in the image of God and lays aside the enmity to God that once filled his heart. Thus the work of the law is fulfilled in his life.

Peter expresses the relationship between the two when he says: "Who His own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sin, might live unto righteousness." 1 Peter 2:24.

## **The Past and Future Bearings of the Atonement**

Bearing of the atonement on the past.

THE word "atonement" in its historic, as distinguished from its etymological, sense is apt to create the impression that the redemptive work of Christ bears on the past only; that it consists exclusively in making amends for sins previously committed. In that respect the word "satisfaction" is a better word, since it does not necessarily have that one-sided connotation. Strictly speaking, atonement is always retrospective and aims at recompensing for the wrongs of the past. And this is an important part of the objective work of Jesus Christ. "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 laid on Him the iniquity of us all," Isa. 53:5, 6. He gave His life a ransom for many. His blood is "the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins," Matt. 26:28. He "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us," Gal. 3:13. In Him "we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace," Eph. 1:7.

The idea that it bears on the past only; The Arminian view.

It is sometimes represented as if this were the whole of the work of Christ. This is done particularly by those who base the atoning work of Christ exclusively on His bitter sufferings and on His shameful death on the cross. Anselm forms an exception, however, since he connects the idea of merit, though in a rather artificial way, with the notion of a satisfaction to the honor of God. In his view Christ gave satisfaction for the guilt of sin by his sufferings and death, but also merited eternal life for the sinner. The position of the Arminians is different, however, for they recognize the distinction between the passive and active obedience of Christ, and maintain that the latter has no saving significance, since Christ owed it to God for Himself. His passive obedience, on the other hand, His sufferings and death, while not an exact equivalent of the punishment due to the sinner, was yet so acceptable to God that it moved Him to give full pardon to the sinner. In that sense it can be said that He atoned for the sins of the past, but He did not by his active obedience merit life for anyone. His righteousness is not the basis of our acceptance with God, is not the ground of our adoption, and does not make us heirs of everlasting life. It is only our faith, including a life of evangelical obedience, that is accounted to us for righteousness. To that extent man must work out his own salvation. In this scheme there is no prospective aspect of the atonement as such.

The view of Piscator; View of Wesleyan Arminians.

A similar position was taken by a Reformed theologian, Piscator, of whose doctrine Buchanan says: "... while it ascribed the remission of sins to the passive obedience, or the sufferings and death of Christ, it excluded the imputation of His active obedience, or righteousness, as the believer's title to eternal life; and thus left a door open for the introduction of his own personal obedience, as the ground of his future hope, after he had obtained the remission of his past sins." *The Doctrine of Justification*, p. 175. From some of the peculiar tenets of the Wesleyan or Evangelical Arminians, it might seem to follow that they would agree to the proposition that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers, but as a matter

of fact they deny that this is taught anywhere in the Bible. They fully agree with the older Arminians that the atoning work of Christ is limited to his passive obedience, and that in virtue of this the sinner receives the forgiveness of sins, but is not adopted as a child of God nor made an heir of eternal life. In distinction from these views Reformed theologians hold that the atonement of Jesus Christ also has a prospective aspect. It not only has the effect of restoring man to his original state, the state of freedom from guilt, but also that of making him acceptable to God and an heir of life eternal.

Denial of the bearing of the atonement on past sins by various theories.

But while it is necessary to stress this point, it is equally essential to emphasize the fact that the atonement of Christ has not only a prospective but also a retrospective bearing. It takes account of past sins, and is the basis of their forgiveness. There are theories of the atonement which simply ignore past sins and proceed on the assumption that they require no atonement. According to these the atonement is not retrospective, but only prospective. This is a virtual denial of the whole idea of atonement. An atonement that is not retrospective, is no atonement in the proper sense of the word. This is true of both the Moral Influence and the Example Theory, according to which God simply lets bygones be bygones and is interested only in weaning men from sin for the future. It is equally true of the Mystical Theory with its representation of Christ as a new leaven in humanity, by which the human race is gradually purged from sin. Like the previous theories it leaves the generations before the incarnation entirely out of account and has no bearing on the past sins of those who have come under the purifying influence of Christ. The same must be said even of the Governmental Theory with its quasi-objective reference, for according to it the sufferings of Christ, while a punishment for past sins, did not in any way atone for sin. They constituted merely a penal example inflicted on Christ, in order to deter others from sinning. They did not bear on the

removal of past sins, but only on the prevention of future sins. In all these cases we have a so-called atonement which is exclusively prospective. Every one of these theories, with the single exception of the Grotian or Governmental Theory, shifts the emphasis from the death to the life of Christ. It is by His life rather than by His death that He exercises a saving influence on the life of sinful men. He reveals God as a loving Father who, without requiring any satisfaction for past transgressions, is quite ready and even anxious to pardon His erring children, to receive them in favor, and to press them to His bosom, if they but come to Him with penitent hearts. He calls them back from their sinful ways, urges upon them a life of love to God and to their fellow-men, and gives them the spirit of true obedience as the way to everlasting life. He enters sympathetically into all their sufferings and struggles, helps them to bear their burdens, and points to the door of hope in the Kingdom of God. Misunderstood and rejected by His contemporaries, His devotion to the ideal finally resulted in His crucifixion, an "innocent victim of maladjustment." His death only serves to reinforce the lessons of His life. Brunner correctly calls attention to the fact that in the subjective theories of the atonement guilt is not taken seriously. Says he: "If the Cross merely denotes the removal of a religious error, namely that God is not (should be, 'is') an angry Judge, then guilt is not taken seriously. If guilt is taken seriously, then there is no help save in a real happening, which really 'cleanses' us from actual guilt." *The Mediator*, p. 471.

The penal vicarious doctrine not one-sided; The elements stressed in other theories not of the essence of the atonement.

The penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement is often accused of one-sidedness, though as a matter of fact it is less one-sided than the other theories are. It is sometimes said that it limits the atoning work of Christ entirely to His sufferings and death, but this accusation, if it is not a wilful perversion of the truth, must be due to lack of information. The Reformers corrected the Anselmian view of satisfaction on this point, as on several other points, and

their view does full justice to the atoning significance of the life of Jesus. In fact, it does not neglect the redemptive significance of the various elements stressed in the other theories. We may even go farther than that by saying that these elements are seen in their proper perspective only in connection with the Penal Substitutionary Doctrine. But then they are seen, not as elements which are essential to the atonement as such, and really enter into the constitution of it, but only as some of its concomitants or subordinate results. Martin makes some strong but true remarks on these theories. Says he: "There is no measure of truth in them, even though they should be put forth as partial answers to the question which they profess to solve. They have no right to stand as even a portion of the truth concerning the doctrine of the intrinsic nature and immediate object and design of the Atonement. There is not even an element of truth in them that will co-ordinate with that doctrine as maintained by the whole Catholic Church of God... And in the third place: regarded as secondary and subordinate results of the Atonement,—not entering into its intrinsic nature and explanatory of its immediate design, but as mere secondary and subordinate results,—even in this light, the contents of these theories are not truth and fact, but merely unrealized and unrealizable ideas, mere conceptions which the theories themselves can never embody as realities. And in this sense also, as in every other, there is no measure of truth in them. They never can be translated into truth and fact; they never can emerge from the dreamland, from the region of the ideal and of mere conception; till they are acknowledged as, not of the essence and constituting idea of the atonement, but only as the secondary and subordinate outcome thereof." *The Atonement*, p. 68 f.

The bearing of the elements stressed by other theories.

Christ is held up as an example in Scripture indeed, but is not represented as saving men by His example; in fact, He is never set forth as an example for unbelievers, but only as an example of those who are already reconciled to God through Christ. Others cannot

possibly follow in His steps, not even at a remote distance. Christ undoubtedly exercises profound moral influence on men, but this mere moral influence has no saving efficacy. It may be a real spiritual influence, but again only in the lives of those who are already implanted in Him by faith. The work of the indwelling Christ becomes a part, not of the atonement—which is presupposed—but of the application of the work of redemption. The sufferings and death of Christ are undoubtedly a manifestation of the fact that sin is highly displeasing to God; but the mere spectacle of His punishing sin in Christ will not save the sinner. It will not even awaken repentance in his heart, unless the sight of it is re-inforced by the thought that the Savior is suffering in his stead and dies as his substitute, and both are savingly applied by the Holy Spirit. In view of all this we maintain that the theories in question represent elements which are true and effective only if the penal substitutionary atonement is presupposed. And even then they cannot be regarded as integral parts of the atonement, but only as some of its fruits.

The atonement includes both passive and active obedience.

The atonement in Christ includes both His passive and active obedience. While we make this distinction, we feel that the two cannot be separated in fact, and therefore should not be separated in thought. There is a constant interpenetration of them at every point in the Savior's life. It was a part of His passive obedience that He who was the supreme lawgiver lived in subjection to the law. And it was also a part of his active obedience that He subjected Himself voluntarily to sufferings and death, John 10:18. The two simply form complementary parts of His mediatorial obedience.

The passive obedience of Christ.

He entered into the penal relationship in which the sinner by nature stands to the law, in order to pay the penalty of sin in His sufferings and death, and to discharge the debt of all His people. His sufferings

did not come upon Him accidentally, nor as the result of purely natural circumstances. They were judicially laid upon Him as our substitute, and were therefore real penal sufferings. The redemptive value of these sufferings results from the following facts: They were borne by a divine Person who, only in virtue of His divinity, could bear the penalty to the end and thus obtain freedom from it. In view of the infinite value of Him as the Son of God His sufferings satisfied the justice of God essentially and intensively. Moreover, they were strictly moral sufferings, because He took them upon Himself voluntarily, and was perfectly innocent and holy in bearing them. Scripture proof for the passive obedience of Christ is found in such passages as Isa. 53:6; Rom. 4:25; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 2:2, and many others which have already been mentioned in previous chapters. In this connection it should be borne in mind that even the passive obedience of Christ was not limited to His final sufferings and death. His entire life was a life of vicarious suffering. For this reason, if for no others, the objection is untenable that the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement places the entire weight of His atoning work on His sacrificial death.

#### The active obedience of Christ.

But in addition to this there is also the active obedience of Christ. He also entered into the federal relationship to the law in which Adam originally stood. He undertook to observe the law in its federal aspect as the condition of the covenant of works, in order to merit eternal life for the sinner. The active obedience of Christ was absolutely essential, for without it His human nature would have fallen short of the just demands of God, and He would not have been able to atone for others. Moreover, if He had merely suffered the penalty imposed on man, he would have left those for whom He paid the price in the exact position in which Adam stood before the fall. And every individual would have been confronted with the task of meriting eternal life for himself. If man cannot receive it on the ground of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, he will have to make his own righteousness count in that direction. And it would be

possible for one whose sins are already pardoned to fall once more under the condemning power of the law and to miss the goal. It is exactly the active obedience of Christ that lends finality to the work of atonement. He does not permit the final condition of those for whom He shed His blood to be contingent on an uncertain obedience, but makes this absolutely certain. He does no half work, but saves to the uttermost. There is abundant biblical proof for the active obedience of Christ. Jesus tells His disciples that they must have a righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, which was their own, Matt. 5:20. And Paul refers to it in several places. He says that Christ placed Himself under the law, "that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," Gal. 4:5. He even speaks of Christ as "the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth," Rom. 10:4. In another passage he gives us the comforting assurance that God made Him who knew no sin "to be sin in our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," 2 Cor. 5:21. And, finally, he contrasts his own righteousness with the righteousness of God, when he says: "And be found in Him (Christ), not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith," Phil. 3:9. By His active obedience Christ merited our adoption into the very family of God, and made us heirs of eternal life, the free gift of God in Him, Rom. 6:23.

Arminian arguments against the active obedience.

This is one of the most important points on which we differ from the Arminians. They deny what we affirm, namely, that the active obedience of Christ or His active righteousness is imputed to believers as if it were their own, and becomes the basis of their acceptance with God and of their future bliss. "For this notion," says Watson, "that the righteousness of Christ is so imputed as to be accounted our own, there is no warrant in the Word of God." Theological Institutes II, p. 428. He speaks of this as the view of Calvinists and Antinomians. In his arguments against the

Antinomians on page 328 he also presents his arguments against this view, which are briefly stated as follows: (1) The Bible ascribes no such significance to the active righteousness of Christ, but simply represents it as rendering Him a fit sacrifice for sin. (2) This doctrine really makes the sufferings of Christ superfluous. If He did all that the law requires of us, there was no more need of suffering in our stead. Either one of the two is sufficient. (3) It involves a fiction opposed to the ends of moral government, and shuts out the obligation of personal obedience to the law of God. (4) It is not satisfaction in the proper sense, but merely the performance of all that the law requires by one person substituted for another.

Answer to the arguments.

Now it is true that, according to Scripture, the active obedience of Christ rendered His sacrifice acceptable, but this is not the only significance ascribed to it. This clearly appears from the passages which were already quoted. He became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The second argument contains an evident fallacy. The presupposition is that, because the first Adam had to do one of two things, either obey the law or bear the punishment for its transgression, this also applies to the second or last Adam. But this is not correct, since the entrance of sin into the world changed the situation entirely. After the penalty of sin is borne, the task of securing eternal life by positive obedience to the law still remains. The Arminians themselves feel this, for they teach that Christ's passive obedience does not yet secure eternal life for the sinner. The sinner can only obtain this by keeping the law of evangelical obedience. His faith is accounted to him for righteousness. This proves that something more than the sufferings of Christ is necessary unto salvation. God lets down the bars somewhat, but the sinner must obey the new law, in order to be saved. In their attempt to show that this is not salvation by works, the Arminians often argue in a way which represents a virtual acceptance of the Calvinistic position. The third argument maintains that the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the

sinner involves a legal fiction opposed to the ends of moral government, and shuts out the obligation of personal obedience to the law of God. However, imputation is no fiction, but Scripture truth, as appears from such passages as Rom. 5:18 ff.; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21. And this particular imputation does not in any way cancel the obligation of the sinner to keep the law of God. It merely sets him free from the law as the condition of the covenant of works. The final argument does not mean very much, since it is based on a restricted use of the word "satisfaction." The active obedience of Christ certainly served to satisfy the requirements of the law, and in that sense can be called satisfaction.

## **The Subjective Effects of the Atonement**

The atonement not the whole of Christ's redemptive work.

THE atonement is not the whole of the redemptive work of Christ, though it is fundamental. It is rooted in the Counsel of Peace and issues in peace with God and the spiritual renewal of the sinner. It is not merely an arrangement by which God makes salvation possible, but a very essential and even the most fundamental part of His saving work. It effects nothing short of the complete and perfect redemption of sinners. These results are in no way contingent on the uncertain obedience of men, but are absolutely sure. The fruits of the meritorious work of Christ are applied to all those for whom He paid the penalty and met the requirements of the covenant of works.

The immediate result is reconciliation.

The immediate result of the atonement is reconciliation. In Christ God is reconciled to the sinner. All the penal demands of the law are

met and the judicial anger of God is averted. But this is not all; even the original covenant requirements are fully satisfied. And on the basis of the completed work of Christ God now offers the sinner, not only the forgiveness of past transgressions, but also acceptance with Him and all the blessings of salvation. Through the gospel he is urged to be reconciled to God, that is, to accept the proffered reconciliation. He can do this only by faith in Jesus Christ. But even this faith, while a voluntary act on the part of man, is not contingent on his mere will. It is itself a gift of God in Jesus Christ, Eph. 2:8. God endows with faith all those for whom Christ has made atonement, and thereby renders the appropriation of His redemptive work absolutely certain. By faith man accepts the righteousness of Christ as his own, and in virtue of this is both justified and sanctified.

The fruits of the atonement appropriated by faith.

The exercise of faith is therefore an important element in the subjective realization of the work of redemption. It is the only necessary condition to render the atoning sacrifice of Christ effective in the lives of sinners. Scripture does not leave us in doubt as to its importance. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life," John 3:36. "To Him bear all the prophets witness, that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive the remission of sins," Acts 10:43. "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house," Acts 16:31. "Even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ," Gal. 2:16.

The nature of saving faith.

It is quite evident that the expressions used (faith in, on, or into Jesus Christ) do not refer to a mere intellectual assent to the claims of Christ or to the truth of His doctrine, but also denote a reliance on and a trust in Him and His atoning work. In the exercise of this faith the sinner looks away from himself, and looks exclusively to

Jesus Christ for salvation. He ceases to rely on his own virtues and good works and reposes solely on the atoning blood and on the merits of the Savior. By faith he is so united with Christ that he can say that he is in Christ, and that Christ liveth in him; that he is crucified and has died with Christ; and that with Him he is raised up and set in heavenly places. This rich and full conception of faith has no place in the other theories of the atonement. In the Socinian Example Theory faith is merely obedience to God and belief in the truth of Christ's message. In the Moral Influence Theory it is a bare assent to the message of the Redeemer and a willing submission to His spiritual influence. In neither of these can sinners truly be said to trust in Christ and to commit all their interests to His charge. Nor can it be said in any proper sense of the word that they are united to Him by faith. Even the Governmental Theory fails to do justice to the biblical concept of faith. It ignores the fact, stressed by Protestant theology, that in its fundamental nature faith is purely receptive, and represents it as the condition of salvation sovereignly imposed on man as a legal demand which he must meet, or as a work which he must perform, and which becomes the ground of his justification.

The sinner is justified by faith.

By faith the sinner appropriates the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christ became sin on his behalf, and the sinner becomes the righteousness of God in Christ. The immediate effect of this is that he is justified. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him as his own, and God declares that for him all the demands of the law are met. His sins are pardoned, the sentence of condemnation is lifted, and he is restored to favor. God puts him in the position of a son and declares him to be an heir of everlasting life. Justification does not yet effect a change in the moral condition of man, but alters his legal standing completely. It is quite evident from Scripture that the words "justify" and "justification" do not have a moral but a legal meaning. They do not refer to a change of moral character, but to a change of legal relationship. By a declarative act God acquits the

sinner and absolves him from the claims of the law, since they are met in the Mediator. The forensic or legal meaning of these terms appears from the fact that they are placed in opposition to "condemn" and "condemnation," as, for instance, in Deut. 25:1, "They shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked"; Prov. 17:15, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah"; Rom. 5:18, "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."

Negative element of justification: forgiveness of sins.

This justification includes two elements, the one negative and the other positive. The negative element is the forgiveness of sins. On the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ God pardons the sinner. This is not a sovereign act of the Ruler of the universe, an act merely dependent on His free choice; but a judicial act of the supreme Judge, which takes due recognition of the demands of the law and upholds its majesty. It is not a declaration of God that He will simply overlook sin and ignore the demands of the law (which would be unjust), nor that the sinner is innocent in himself (which would be untrue); but a judicial pronouncement that, as far as the sinner in question is concerned, the demands of the law are met and its claims will no more be held against him. God gives the sinner the assurance that by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ the guilt of sin, as liability to punishment, is removed, and that he is no more an object of wrath. Mercy and justice are combined and operate in perfect harmony.

This element in other Theories.

In all the purely subjective theories of the atonement the forgiveness of sins is simply a sovereign act of divine mercy, which takes little or no account of the demands of the law and of the penalty attached to transgressions. God is so loving and benevolent

that He cannot find it in His heart to insist on strict justice and to inflict the threatened punishment. He simply overlooks or forgets about sin as if it were some insignificant thing, something like an offense against a mere private individual. Though this is regarded as an exhibition of the great love of God, it really minimizes the manifestation of His love by assuming that the forgiveness of sins is a simple and easy thing. The real cost of it is not taken into consideration. Such a view of forgiveness does not impress the sinner with the seriousness and heinousness of sin. Neither does it satisfy his conscience, since the feeling remains that the demands of the law are not met and that punishment is still due. There is no sense of peace or security. Even a Unitarian like Drummond admits that the doctrine of vicarious atonement has an advantage here. Says he: "It emphasizes the heinousness of sin as a violation of God's eternal order. In doing so it repeats the verdict of conscience, which recognizes no human convention, but a Divine sanctity, in the moral law. It is this that makes sin the supreme evil, and brings it under the judgment of God. Here, then, we find a truth that cannot be too strongly stated; and if the rebel against God can understand something of the divine disapproval of sin only under the figure of wrath, it is well that he should thus fling aside the idea that God is indifferent to sin." *Studies in Christian Doctrine*, p. 353 f.

Positive element in justification: acceptance, adoption.

There is also a positive element in justification, consisting in acceptance with God or the adoption of children. The sinner is put in the legal position of a son and heir. He receives a clear title to all the blessings of salvation, so that his future state is secure and in no way contingent on his uncertain obedience. Scripture testifies to this blessing in more than one place. John speaks of it in his Gospel when he says, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name," John 1:12. Paul writes to the Romans, "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of

adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father," Rom. 8:15. In his letter to the Galatians he speaks in a very similar vein. Christ is born of a woman, born under the law, "that He might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father," Gal. 4:5, 6. The same truth finds expression also in Titus 3:7, "... that, being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." In virtue of their justification believers are entitled to all the blessings of the sonship in the present and in the future. They are heirs of God. This means that they receive what they have not themselves merited, and that they are yet more sure of all that their sonship includes than they would be, if it were contingent on their virtues or good works.

Arminian denial of this element.

Here again the Arminian denies what we affirm. He readily grants that we receive the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, but considers this to be the whole of justification. We are not accepted or adopted as children on the basis of the merits of Jesus Christ, but must establish our own righteousness before God. If we believe in Christ with a faith that includes evangelical obedience, we thereby lay the foundation for our acceptance with God; this faith is reckoned unto us for righteousness. But because faith may fail at any moment, this foundation is rather insecure, and the assurance of salvation is impossible. The child of God is bound to live in uncertainty and fear all its days.

Justification in Moral Influence Theory.

The advocates of the Moral Influence Theory of the atonement do not all speak of justification in the same vein. For some of them it is not a judicial declaration, but an act of spiritual renewal. "To justify" does not mean "to declare," but "to make just." According to

Bushnell faith unites us to Christ and gives the power of Christ opportunity to work in us the work of renewal. "So the sinner is justified, and the justification is a most vital affair; 'the justification of life'." *The Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 434 f. Justification is therefore a part of the process of renewal or of sanctification. Others continue to regard justification as a declarative act, but a declarative act based on a spiritual proclivity or disposition in man, an initial submission to the operation of the Holy Spirit, and aspiration to do the things that are well pleasing to God. Says Stevens: "Justification by faith is God's acceptance of the will for the deed. Salvation is by aspiration, that is, by the choice and preference of the good. God accepts and treats us, not according to what we are, but according to what we would like to be." *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, p. 458. David Smith expresses himself in a way that reminds one now of the one and anon of the other view. *Op. cit.*, p. 206 f.

Ethical bearings of the atonement.

They consider such representations necessary, in order to safeguard the ethical bearings of the atonement. But the Penal Substitutionary Doctrine of the atonement does this just as effectively. In justification the sinner receives the absolute assurance that God will put him in possession of all the blessings of salvation, and this can be done and is done only in the way of spiritual renewal. The faith by which he is justified also unites him to Christ; in fact, it justifies him only because it unites him to Christ. And in virtue of the mystical union with Christ the complete spiritual renewal of the sinner is assured. The gift of Christ guarantees all further gifts, as Paul says in Rom. 8:32, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" And again in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Wherefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." When God adopts us to be His children, he also sends "forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father," Gal. 4:6. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of renewal, which transforms the lives of all those who are united to

Christ by faith. "We all," says the apostle, "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit," 2 Cor. 3:18. Whom God justifies, them He also sanctifies and glorifies. Rom. 8:30.

This work of renewal and sanctification is primarily a work of the Holy Spirit; but it is a work in which the regenerated sinner can and should co-operate. The Spirit as the principle of a new obedience will even prompt him to say with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man," Rom. 7:22. And as long as he listens to the voice and follows the promptings of the Spirit, he will not think of saying what according to the opponents the doctrine of justification will give them occasion to say, Let us continue in sin that grace may abound! They will rather heed the admonition of the apostle, "Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Cor. 7:1.

## **The Restricted Design of the Atonement**

The real point at issue.

WHAT was said in the preceding respecting the close relation between the atonement and the covenant of redemption, in which Christ appears as the representative, not of all men, but only of those whom the Father has given Him, already contains a clear indication of the limited design of the atonement. But it will not be superfluous to call particular attention to this subject, especially in view of the widespread conviction that the atonement in Christ is universal in purpose. Before entering upon a discussion of the question, whether the atonement is universal or particular, it will be

necessary to state the point at issue clearly and precisely. The question is not, whether the atoning work of Christ was sufficient for all men, for this is admitted by all. Even Calvinistic Churches state this explicitly in one of their Confessional standards, namely in the Canons of Dort II, Art. 3. Neither is it, whether the atonement actually effectuates or at least insures the salvation of all men, since this extreme position is taken only by absolute Universalists, which are few in number and take little account of the teachings of Scripture. On the basis of the love of God they simply conclude that all souls are included in the gracious redemptive purpose of God, and are saved through Christ as the highest revelation of the love of God.

Lutheran position.

The real point at issue in the controversy that has been carried on for centuries pertains to the design or purpose of the atonement. Did God in sending His Son into the world to be the Savior of sinners, and did Christ by taking upon Himself the work of redemption, intend to save all men, that is, all the individuals of the human race; or did they intend to save only the elect whose representative Christ became in the Counsel of Redemption? Lutherans and Arminians take the former position, and Calvinists the latter. Koestlin calls attention to the fact that Luther in his earlier period apparently believed in a limited atonement, but accepted the broader view later on. *The Theology of Luther II*, pp. 287, 288. Dr. Valentine, the late professor of Systematic Theology in the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, expresses the doctrine of his Church in the following words: "The design of the atonement was to remove the moral and legal obstacles to the salvation of all men, so that it is applicable to one as well as another on terms that are open and impartial to all." *Christian Theology II*, p. 159.

Arminian position.

The Arminian position is entirely in harmony with this, as appears from the second of The Five Arminian Articles, where we read that "Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that He has obtained for them all, by His death on the cross, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins, except the believer." Watson says that the question "put in its most simple form is, whether our Lord Jesus Christ did so die for all men, as to make salvation attainable by all men. The affirmative of this question is, I think, the doctrine of Scripture." Theological Institutes III, p. 2. Miley states the point very clearly when he says: "The true inquiry, therefore, respects the will of the Father and the Son, or what was the pleasure of each respecting the extent of the atonement." Systematic Theology II, p. 221.

Statement of the issue by Calvinists.

That this is also the sense in which Calvinists understand the question, appears from the following statements. "The pivot on which the controversy—respecting the extent of the atonement—turns is, what was the purpose of the Father in sending the Son to die, and the object which Christ had in view in dying; not what is the value and efficacy of his death." Turretin, *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 124. "But the question does truly and only relate to the design of the Father and of the Son in respect to the persons for whose benefit the atonement was made; that is, to whom, in the making of it, they intended it should be applied." Hodge, *Atonement*, p. 359. "The controversy with regard to the extent of the atonement does not turn—though many of the Universalists would fain have it so—upon the question of the infinite sufficiency of Christ's sufferings and merits, it must turn upon the question of the purpose, design, or intention of God in inflicting sufferings and death upon His Son, and of Christ in voluntarily submitting to them." Cunningham, *Historical Theology II*, p. 334.

Semi-Pelagian and Arminian construction of the doctrine.

The most prevalent view is that of a universal atonement, but this doctrine is not construed by all in exactly the same sense. Semi-Pelagians and Arminians are of the opinion that, since man by sin lost the ability to fulfil the conditions of the covenant of life (or, of works), God now offers him salvation on other and easier terms, namely faith and repentance or evangelical obedience. He makes this offer in view of the work of Jesus Christ which, on that theory, made salvation possible for every individual of the human race by paying the penalty of sin. Christ died for all men distributively, and gives to all men sufficient grace to enable them to repent and believe. Now it merely depends on their will, whether they will ultimately be saved or not. It is admitted that the application of the atonement is not universal. The Arminian Articles state that "no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins, except the believer"; and the Council of Trent says that "the heavenly Father, the Father of mercies, sent Christ, His Son, to men, that all might become His adopted children.... Yet, although He died for all, all do not receive the benefits of His death, but only those who become partakers of the merits of His passion." Sess. VI, c., 2, 3. A distinction is made between what is usually called the "impetration" (purchase) and the application of redemption.

Lutheran representation of it.

Lutherans hold that God sent His Son into the world to make full and real legal satisfaction for the sins of all men individually. On the ground of this perfect satisfaction the offer of salvation is now made to all who hear the gospel. In the gospel call and in the sacraments they receive a grace which, if not resisted, is quite sufficient to secure their actual salvation. Knapp expresses it thus: "Actu primo, Christ died for all men; but actu secundo, not for all men, but only for believers—that is, according to the purpose of God, all might be exempted from punishment and rendered happy by the death of Christ; but all do not suffer this purpose actually to take effect with regard to themselves; and only believers actually attain to this blessedness." *Christian Theology*, p. 348.

## View of the School of Saumur.

The idea of the School of Saumur and its followers, called Calvinistic Universalists, is still different. They assume a twofold decree respecting the redemption of man, the one general and the other particular. Pursuant to the former Christ came into the world for the purpose of saving all men conditionally, that is, on the condition that they would believe. In virtue of this decree, which preceded the decree of election, His work naturally had no special bearing on an elect number, and in fact did not secure the salvation of a single sinner. It merely made salvation possible for all. Since God foresaw that, on account of the wickedness of their hearts, none would believe, He determined in a second decree to bestow upon some the faith that was required unto salvation. In accordance with this decree Christ came into the world to purchase salvation absolutely for an elect number. He not only made salvation possible for them, but made it effectual in their lives. This is an unsuccessful attempt to combine Arminianism and Calvinism. Cf. Turretin, *The Atonement of Christ*, p. 119 f.

## The Calvinistic view.

All these views have one element in common: they assume that there is a difference in extent between the design of God's atoning work in Christ and the result actually attained, between the objective atonement and its subjective application. In opposition to all such theories the Calvinist holds that the design of the atonement was limited, that is, that God sent His Son into the world for the purpose of atoning for the sins of the elect; and that Christ gave His life only for those who were given Him by the Father. Moreover, they believe that the atonement is effectual in the lives of all those for whom it is made. It necessarily carries with it all that is needed for the application of the work of redemption. Christ not only made salvation possible, but actually saves, and saves to the uttermost, every one for whom He has made atonement. God's designs do not fail through the failure of men to meet the

requirements of the gospel. This view is substantiated by several considerations.

#### Proof from doctrine of election.

The doctrine of sovereign election, as taught in Scripture, may certainly be regarded as expressive of the purpose of God respecting the redemption of sinners. It is to the effect that God from all eternity decreed to save a certain definite number of the fallen human race, and at the same time determined the means by which He would effectuate their salvation. It is but reasonable to suppose that He adapted the means precisely to the end which He had in view. Since the election was clearly personal in decreeing the salvation of certain persons who stood out clearly in the mind of God, we can only suppose that He designed the necessary means also for those and for no other persons and made them effective for the end in view. What consistency would there be in God's electing certain persons unto life everlasting, then sending Christ into the world to make salvation possible for all men but certain for none, and finally leaving it entirely to man to accept or reject the offered salvation, perhaps only to find that others than those whom He had elected made use of the opportunity. And it does not help matters much to substitute foreknowledge for predestination, as the Arminian does. If God knows precisely, as He does, who will and who will not accept the offer of salvation, does it seem reasonable to think that He would send Christ into the world to suffer and die for the purpose of saving those of whom He is sure that they will never meet the conditions and be saved? The question of Boettner is quite pertinent: "Who can believe that He, like a feeble mortal, would 'shoot at the convoy without perceiving the individual birds?' " Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the positive will of God, His eternal decree, cannot be frustrated by men. "The counsel of Jehovah standeth fast forever," Ps. 33:11. "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.... I have purposed. I will also do it," Isa. 46:10, 11. "In whom we also were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of Him who worketh all

things after the counsel of His will," Eph. 1:11. According to the doctrine of universal atonement the very purpose of God is frustrated. While He purposes to save all men, only a limited number is actually saved. The purpose of God is defeated through unbelief. Man rather than God is in control of the destinies of life.

Proof from the Counsel of Redemption.

A related argument is derived from the Counsel of Redemption. In this covenant a definite relation was established between Christ and those for whom He was to lay down His life. He became their representative, and thus laid the basis for His atoning work. Without such a personal relationship or union a vicarious atonement would have been quite impossible. Now it is perfectly evident that this covenant did not include all men, but only a limited number. Jesus speaks repeatedly of those whom the Father has given Him, John 10:29; 17:6, 9, 11, 12, 24, in opposition to others who are of the world. If the question is raised, whether this giving may not refer to a giving in time by means of regeneration, calling, and conversion, it may be said that this interpretation is clearly ruled out by such a passage as John 6:37. "All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Moreover, it is plainly taught in Scripture that the covenant of grace, which is based on the counsel of redemption does not include all men. The work of Christ is clearly connected with the covenant of redemption or the covenant of grace, and cannot be dissociated from it. He is called the Mediator of a new covenant. Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, and the Surety of a better covenant, Heb. 7:22. Since then He is the Mediator and Surety of a limited number, we cannot very well proceed on the assumption that He laid down His life for the purpose of saving all men.

Proof from the fact that God requires no double satisfaction.

Another argument is based on the fact that, according to the doctrine of universal atonement, as held by some, God is really

exacting a double satisfaction for sin. If Christ really satisfied the demands of the law for all men, if He made atonement or amends for all, meeting all their legal requirements, it would seem that the law would have no further claim on them as a condition of life, and could not very well exact another satisfaction of them by eternal punishment. If it be said that this is due to the failure of sinners to accept the atonement, the answer is that, according to Scripture, the atonement of Christ necessarily carries with it the realization of the work of redemption, since He paid the penalty of those for whom He atoned in full and merited for them all that is necessary unto salvation. Through His atoning work He not only made salvation possible for them, but actually secures their reconciliation and the application of all that He has merited for them. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep and brings them in, John 10:15, 16. "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life," Rom. 5:10; cf. also 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7. Faith itself is a gift of God and a fruit of the atoning work of Christ, Eph. 2:8. Christ not only places salvation at man's disposal, but saves to the uttermost, Heb. 7:25. This means that there is no condemnation for those for whom the price was paid.

Proof from the intercession of Christ.

The close connection between the atonement and the intercessory work of Christ furnishes us another argument for a limited atonement. The atonement and the intercession are simply two integral parts of His priestly work, of which the latter is based on the former in such a way that the two are, from the nature of the case, equally restricted as far as their objects are concerned. The intercession of Christ consists in part in the presentation of His atoning sacrifice to the Father as the ground on which He confidently expects the blessings of salvation for His people, and in an intimation of His will in prayer that the purchased blessings of salvation be conferred. This prayer naturally aims at the realization of the work of redemption in all those for whom atonement was

made, and yet is clearly limited in extent. This follows from the fact that His prayer is always effective, and yet countless numbers are not saved. He says that the Father always hears Him, John 11:42, and feels justified in giving His intercessory prayer the form of a demand: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am," John 17:24. Moreover, He says expressly: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me"; and "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word," John 17:9, 20. And if He prays for them only, it would seem to follow that they only were the objects of His atoning work. This argument is not affected by Jesus' prayer recorded in Luke 23:34, which is simply a prayer that the Father shall not place the sin of the crucifixion to the special account of those who were actually engaged in it, since they were doing it in ignorance. It forms no part of His official intercessory work.

Proof from Scripture passages.

There are, moreover, several passages in Scripture which contain a clear delimitation of the work of the atonement as far as its objects are concerned. In the annunciation the angel said, "... and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins," Matt. 1:21. Jesus Himself spoke with a similar restriction when He said: "I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep," John 10:11, 15. In the following chapter the writer of the Fourth Gospel speaks of Jesus as dying for the nation; "and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad," John 11:51, 52. Paul admonishes the Ephesian elders "to feed the Church of the Lord which He purchased with His own blood," Acts 20:28. The same truth, that Christ gave Himself for the Church, is also taught in Eph. 5:25. In verse 23 He is specifically called "the Saviour of the body, that, is, of the Church. And Romans 8:32 ff. teaches that He died for the elect: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him

freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

Proof from the absurdities of the opposite position.

Furthermore, an argument may be derived from the absurdities involved in the opposite position. If we proceed on the assumption that Christ was sent into the world and died for the express purpose of saving all men, then it follows: (1) That we must be ready to believe that God's positive will, His divine purpose, and not merely His revealed will, can be frustrated by man; and that the work of Christ was an uncertain hazard, failed to a great extent, and might even have failed completely, so that not a single sinner was saved. But this is quite contrary to such passages as Ps. 33:11; Isa. 46:10. (2) That Christ did no more than make salvation possible for sinners, leaving the actual realization of it dependent on the uncertain obedience of man; and that, while Christ atoned for all, the application of His work is simply contingent on man's response. But according to Scripture the purchase and the bestowal of salvation are inseparably connected, Rom. 5:10; 8:32–34; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:7; Heb. 7:25. (3) That many whose sins were atoned and for whom the penalty was paid, are yet lost and will have to bear the penalty of sin eternally, a very inconsistent position, from which there is no logical escape, except in Calvinism or in absolute Universalism. We shall even have to believe the absurdity that Christ laid down His life for the salvation of those who had already died in their sins and were consigned to outer darkness. (4) That Christ by His atoning work did not merit faith, repentance, and all those graces of the Spirit which constitute the application of the work of redemption. But the Bible teaches quite the opposite, Rom. 5:10; Gal. 3:13, 14; Eph. 1:3, 4, 8–10; 2 Tim. 2:25; Titus 3:5, 6.

# Objections to the Doctrine of a Limited Atonement Considered

Objections naturally expected.

IT cannot be denied that some rather serious objections can be raised against the doctrine of a limited atonement. Not to admit this would be folly and might even be an indication of ignorance or superficiality. The situation in the theological world would lead us to suspect this a priori. There must be some at least seemingly adequate reasons why all but the Calvinistic Churches reject this doctrine. At the same time it should not be forgotten that the doctrine of a universal atonement is burdened with even greater difficulties. The objections to the doctrine that Christ atoned for the sins of the elect only may be, and are usually, arranged under the following heads: (1) passages which teach that Christ died for the world or for all men; (2) passages implying the possibility of some being lost for whom Christ died; and (3) the universal and sincere offer of salvation. We shall consider these successively.

There are several passages of Scripture which teach either explicitly or by implication that Christ died or gave Himself "for the world" or "for all." Remensnyder, a Lutheran author, after referring to some of them, says: "Those passages are so specific that we cannot mistake their meaning. They show that the divine scheme of redemption was comprehensive and universal." *The Atonement and Modern Thought*, p. 84. Arminians in general are of the opinion that the doctrine of a universal atonement is so plainly taught in Scripture that one cannot deny it without going contrary to revealed truth.

Passages seemingly teaching that Christ atoned for the world.

The following passages are referred to particularly as teaching that Christ died for the whole world: John 1:29, "Behold, the Lamb of

God that taketh away the sin of The world"; John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life"; John 6:33, 51, "For the bread of life is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world... Yea, and the bread which I give is my flesh, for the life of the world"; Rom. 11:12, 15, "Now if their fall is the riches of the world, and their loss the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness... For if the casting away of them is the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" 2 Cor. 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself"; 1 John 2:2, "And He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world."

Answer to this objection.

The objection based on these passages proceeds on the unwarranted assumption that the term "world" invariably, or at least in the passages quoted, denotes all the individuals which constitute the human race. But it is abundantly evident from Scripture that the term has a variety of meanings. A mere reading of the following passages will prove this conclusively: Luke 2:1; John 1:10; Acts 11:28; 19:27; 24:5; Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6. It is clear also that, when it is used of men, it does not always include all men, John 7:4; 12:10; 14:22; 18:20; Rom. 11:12, 15. Moreover, it should be noted that in some of the passages quoted the word cannot possibly denote all men. If it has that meaning in John 6:33, 51, those passages teach that the bread of life, which came down out of heaven, actually gives life to all men, that is, saves them all. This is more than the opponents themselves believe. The passages prove too much, and therefore prove nothing. Again, in Rom. 11:12, 15 the word "world" cannot be all-inclusive, for the context clearly excludes Israel. Moreover, these passages also speak of the application of the work of redemption, and on the supposition that the word "world" denotes all men, would prove more than is intended, namely, that the fruits of the atoning work of Christ are actually applied to all.

We do find in them, however, an indication of the fact that the word "world" is sometimes used to indicate that the Old Testament particularism belongs to the past, and made way for New Testament universalism. The blessings of the Kingdom were not for Israel only, but for all the nations of the world, Matt. 24:14; Mark 16:16; Rom. 1:5; 10:18. In all probability this is the key to the interpretation of the word "world" in such passages as John 1:29; 6:33, 51; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2. Dr. Shedd assumes that the word "world" means all nations in Matt. 26:13; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2; but holds that in other places it denotes the world of believers, or the Church. He ascribes this meaning to it in John 6:33, 51; Rom. 4:13; Rom. 11:12, 15. Dogm. Theol. II, p. 479 f. Dr. Kuyper expresses a similar idea, namely, that the word "world" denotes the real nucleus of the world, the organism of humanity that is saved by Jesus Christ, and finds that it is so used in John 4:42; 3:16; 1:29, and other passages. *Uit het Woord, Tweede Serie*, 1, p. 409 f. Van Andel also applies this thought in the interpretation of John 1:29; 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19. The difficulty is that, on this supposition, the word "world" is regarded as a designation of two opposite concepts, namely the human race as estranged from and opposed to God, and the human race chosen and redeemed, and united in the service of God.

Passages seemingly teaching that Christ atoned for all; Answer to the objections.

There are also a number of passages which speak of Christ as having died for all men, Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9. To these may be added those passages which express the idea that it is the will of God that all should be saved, 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9. But these passages do not at all prove the point, since it is perfectly evident that the word "all" does not always mean "every individual of the human race." The meaning of the word is naturally determined by the context. If one speaks of the meeting of a society and says that they were all there, one naturally means, not every individual of the human race, but all the members

of the society under consideration. When a preacher substitutes for another and on returning home says, They were all surprised to see me, he naturally refers to a very limited number of the race, namely, to the people of the church which he served. Again, when an ocean liner sinks, and it is reported that all were saved, the word "all" can only refer to those who were on the ship. All this is so self-evident that it need hardly be stated; and yet the advocates of a universal atonement often accuse their opponents of refusing to accept the plain teachings of Scripture, and assert with an air of impatience that when the Bible says "all" it means all, that is every individual of the human race.

In some of the passages mentioned above the meaning of the word "all" is clearly restricted by the context. For instance, the connection plainly shows that the "all" or "all men" of Rom. 5:18, and 1 Cor. 15:22 includes only those who are in Christ. All who are in Adam are contrasted with all who are in Christ. If the word "all" is not so limited in these passages, but actually refers to all individuals of the human race, then they teach, not only that Christ atoned for all men distributively, thus making salvation possible for all, but also that He actually justifies and endows them all with new life, so that all are saved without exception. Thus the Arminian is forced into the camp of the absolute Universalist, where he does not want to be. There is a similar limitation in 2 Cor. 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died." The death of Christ is the death of all to the law, to self, and sin, and this results in a life for Christ. But this can be said only of those who are actually saved. Paul suffered that death, and was therefore now constrained by the love of Christ as the ruling principle of his life. Titus 2:11 speaks of an appearance of the grace of God, bringing salvation to all men in such a way as to instruct them "to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts they (we) should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world." The grace of God is certainly not revealed to all men in that way. The "all" in this verse evidently refers to all classes of men. Even Moses Stuart, who believes in universal atonement,

admits that the word "all" in Heb. 2:9 cannot be taken in a general sense, but refers to Jew and Gentile. He gives the same explanation in the cases of 1 Tim. 2:3, 4; and Titus 2:11. The passages in 1 Tim. 2:3, 4, and 2 Peter 3:9 refer to the revealed will of God that both Jews and Gentiles should be saved, but imply nothing as to the universal intent of the atonement.

Possibility of those being lost for whom Christ died.

A second objection to the doctrine of a limited atonement is based on a few passages which are said to imply the possibility that those for whom Christ died are finally lost, Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Peter 2:1; Heb. 10:29. In the first passage we read: "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died." A very similar passage is that in 1 Cor. 8:11, "For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died." In both cases the stronger brethren of the church are warned against placing an offense (a SKANDALON or trap) in the way of the weaker brethren, and thus doing something that would in itself be apt to cause them to stumble, to fall from faith, and ultimately to perish. By doing that they would be acting entirely contrary to the spirit of Christ. He died to save these weaker brethren, and the stronger ones should be willing to forego a certain privilege, in order to keep them in the way of salvation. These passages do not imply that the weaker brethren could actually fall away and perish any more than the warnings and exhortations directed to believers throughout the New Testament proceed on the assumption that they might still fall from grace and perish. They are evidences of the fact that God uses means to keep them in the way of salvation, and that among these means warnings against evil influences and evil tendencies occupy an important place. Some commentators assume that the word "perish" in these passages does not necessarily refer to eternal destruction, but may simply mean "embitter" or "injure."

The other two passages are of a somewhat different kind. In Heb. 10:29 we read: "Of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he

be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace?" And in 2 Pet. 2:1: "But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." These passages do indeed constitute a real difficulty, but can be explained without assuming that Christ died for all men. The most plausible explanation is that given by Smeaton, as the interpretation of Piscator and of the Dutch annotations, in his comments on 2 Peter 2:1, namely, "that these false teachers are described according to their own profession and the judgment of charity. They gave themselves out as redeemed men, and were so accounted in the judgment of the Church while they abode in her communion." *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles*, p. 447.

Objection derived from the universal offer of salvation.

The third main objection to a limited atonement is derived from the universal offer of salvation. The Arminians were not slow to urge the objection that the Calvinists with their doctrine of unconditional election and limited atonement could not seriously offer the salvation in Christ to all men. But the Synod of Dort did not grant the contention, and explicitly asserted that the gospel call is not only universal but also perfectly sincere on the part of God. It must be admitted, however, that there have been Calvinists who showed considerable hesitation on this point. And we need not flatter ourselves with the thought that we can easily reconcile the doctrine of an unconditional election and a limited atonement with the universal bona fide offer of salvation, for, in spite of all that can be said, there will remain some difficulties. It is customary to point out that the sacrifice of Christ was of infinite value and therefore quite sufficient for the sin of the whole world, but this does not solve the problem.

## Problem as seen by Dr. Cunningham.

In connection with this question Dr. Cunningham calls attention to a rather important distinction. We take the liberty to quote him somewhat at length: "There, are obviously two questions that may be entertained upon this subject: First, Is an unlimited atonement necessary in order to warrant ministers of the gospel, or any who may be seeking to lead others to the saving knowledge of the truth, to offer men, without exception, pardon and acceptance, and to invite them to come to Christ? And secondly, Is an unlimited atonement necessary in order to warrant God in addressing, and in authorizing and requiring us to address, such universal offers and invitations to our fellow-men? The neglect of keeping these two questions distinct, has sometimes introduced error and confusion into the discussion of this subject. It is the first question with which we have more immediately to do, as it affects a duty which we are called upon to discharge; while the second is evidently from its very nature, one of those secret things which belong to the Lord. It is very evident that our conduct, in preaching the gospel, and in addressing our fellow-men with a view to their salvation, should not be regulated by any inferences of our own about the nature, extent, and sufficiency of the provision actually made for saving them, but solely by the directions and instructions which God has given us, by precept and example, to guide us in the matter,—unless, indeed, we venture to act upon the principle of refusing to obey God's commands, until we fully understand all the grounds and reasons of them. God has commanded the gospel to be preached to every creature; He has required us to proclaim to our fellow-men, of whatever character, and in all varieties of circumstances, the glad tidings of great joy,—to hold out to them, in His name, pardon and acceptance through the blood of the atonement,—to invite them to come to Christ, and to receive Him,—and to accompany all this with the assurance that 'whosoever cometh to Him, He will in no wise cast out.' God's revealed will is the only rule, and ought to be held to be the sufficient warrant for all that we do in this matter,—in deciding what is our duty,—in making known to our fellow-man

what are their privileges and obligations,—and in setting before them reasons and motives for improving the one and discharging the other. And though this revelation does not warrant us in telling them that Christ died for all and each of the human race,—a mode of preaching the gospel never adopted by our Lord and His apostles,—yet it does authorize and enable us to lay before men views and considerations, facts and arguments, which, in right reason, should warrant and persuade all to whom they are addressed, to lay hold of the hope set before them,—to turn into the stronghold as prisoners of hope." Historical Theology II, p. 344 f.—He then goes on to discuss the other question, finds a good deal that might be said to prove that God, in offering pardon and acceptance to men indiscriminately, does not act inconsistently and deceptively, but finally admits that difficulties remain which in the last analysis "just resolve into the one grand difficulty of all religion, and of every system of theology,—that, namely, of reconciling the inconsistency between the supremacy and sovereignty of God, and the free agency and responsibility of man." Op. cit. II, p. 346.

No right to assume that God shows no love whatever to the reprobate.

The quotation from Cunningham already makes it apparent that there are certain considerations which may relieve the difficulty somewhat. The following are some of the most important:

We have no right to proceed on the assumption that God's eternal decree to pass a large number of sinners by with His elective grace and to condemn them for their sins, necessarily implies that He had no feelings of love and compassion for them at all, and that therefore the reprobates can only be visited with sin and curse. It is an unscriptural position that God has no compassionate feelings of love for the reprobates at all. This is contradicted in numerous passages of Scripture, which testify to such love, Gen. 39:5; Ps. 145:9, 15, 16; 36:6; Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35, 36; Acts 14:16, 17; Rom. 2:4, and particularly by such passages as Ezek. 18:23, 32;

33:11; Matt. 23:37. Bavinck correctly says: "Maar ook omgekeerd deelen de reprobati in vele zegeningen, die niet als zoodanig uit het besluit der verwerping, maar uit de goedheid en genade Gods hun toevloeien," and quotes among others also the passages cited above. Geref. Dogm. II, p. 416. An interesting and suggestive discussion of this matter may be found in R. L. Dabney's Discussions under the caption, "God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy. He argues that the absence of a volition in God to save does not necessarily imply the absence of compassion. Says he: "The absence of an omnipotent, and inevitably efficient, volition to renew that soul (the soul of a reprobate) does not prove the absence of a true compassion in God for him; and for the same reason the propension may have been in God, but restrained from rising into a volition by superior rational motives," p. 286. And again, after referring to some of the gospel invitations: "That there is a just distinction between God's decretive and preceptive will no thoughtful person can deny. But let the question be stated thus: Do all the solemn and tender entreaties of God to sinners express no more, as to the non-elect, than a purpose of God, uncompassionate and merely rectoral, to acquit Himself of His legislative function towards them? To speak after the manner of men, have all these apparently touching appeals after all no heart in them? We cannot but deem it an unfortunate logic which constrains a man to this view of them. How much more simple and satisfactory to take them for just what they express?—evidences of a true compassion, which yet is restrained, in the case of the unknown class, the non-elect, by consistent and holy reasons, from taking the form of a volition to regenerate, p. 307.

The atonement of Christ sufficient for all.

It is also well to bear in mind, though it does not solve the problem, that the sacrifice of Christ has an inherent value quite sufficient for the atonement of the sin of the whole world. The Schoolmen were accustomed to saying that Christ died sufficiently for all men, but efficaciously for the elect. This language was adopted by some orthodox theologians and even by Calvin. But after the extent of the

atonement had been made the object of special study, Reformed theologians generally refused to state the truth in that form, because it was apt to give the impression that Christ in dying intended that all men should share in the proper effects of His atoning death. They prefer to say that the death of Christ, viewed objectively and apart from His design and purpose, was inherently sufficient for all, though efficacious only for the elect. Miley clearly discerns that the truth of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, so stated, does not solve the difficulty. He says that, while it ascribes to the death of Christ an inherent, it fails to ascribe to it an actual sufficiency. Though sufficient for all, it was not intended for all. However, the statement of this truth has the advantage of narrowing the debate down to the intention of God and of Christ.

The offer of salvation is not a revelation of God's secret will.

Another consideration that should be borne in mind is, that the offer of salvation does not pretend to be a revelation of the secret counsel of God. Hence it does not impinge on the veracity of God. It springs out of His will of complaisance and is expressive of that in which He delights. God may simply call on the non-elect to do a thing in which He delights, simply because He delights in it. While this disposition in God does not terminate in a volition to save the reprobate, it is not altered by the decree of reprobation. "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah: wherefore turn yourselves and live." According to Calvin this passage clearly expresses the idea that God does not delight in the death of him that perishes (the reprobate), but would have him turn and live.

The promise in the universal call is always conditional.

The promise contained in the universal offer of salvation must always be considered as conditioned on faith and conversion. The promise of the gospel is never an unconditional promise. And the condition is of such a kind that man, as he is by nature, cannot fulfil

it. Faith and conversion are the fruit of the operation of the Holy Spirit. But the fact that man cannot obey the demand of the gospel, does not absolve him from the duty to comply with it any more than man's inability to keep the law can be urged as a legitimate excuse for disobedience. And for that same reason the preacher, who feels duty bound to urge on man the demands of the law, is also warranted and obliged to present to them the claims of the gospel.

The universal call does not consist in the declaration that Christ died for all.

The universal offer of salvation does not include the declaration that Christ made atonement for all sinners distributively, or that God intends to save each one of them. It consists of three parts: (1) An exposition of the atoning work of Christ as in itself, and apart from the divine intention, of sufficient value to redeem all. (2) A description of the condition attached, that is, of the real nature of the repentance and faith that is required in the sinner that comes to Christ, including a clear indication of the fact that these are the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit. (3) A declaration that each one who comes to Christ with true faith and repentance will obtain the blessings of the forgiveness of sins and of eternal life.

The preacher need not harmonize the secret counsel of God with His revealed will.

It is not the duty of the preacher to harmonize the secret counsel of God respecting the redemption of sinners with His declarative will, as it is expressed in the universal offer of salvation. He is an official ambassador, whose duty it is to carry out the will of his Lord in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. His warrant does not lie in the secret counsel of God, but in His revealed will, and more particularly in the great commission. If in the army of God his marching orders are clear, as they are, he has no right to disobey, just because he does not quite understand how the little part which

he must play fits in with the great plan of the Lord who sent him, "the captain of our salvation."

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