

OF THE

## ATONEMENT

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## THE NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT

While the Bible is strewn with expressions of God's love and grace, and kindness and goodness, it is a mistake to suppose that He ever, for one instant, or in the smallest degree, waives His righteousness, holiness, or majesty. It would be a flaw in the divine character if one attribute or quality were exercised at the expense of another. There is much misunderstanding about this. Some seem to think that to forgive sin, God simply has to pronounce a decree, to give a command, and it is done. That, they suppose, is all that is requisite. But if that were so, what sort of condition would the universe get into? If the forgiveness of transgressions were a mere matter of emotion in the mind of God, where would be the security of law? It would be gone. God could no longer maintain His throne. If it were once public in the universe, that the infraction of divine laws was of no consequence, that it was only for God to forgive the sin and there would be an end of the matter, the result would be a moral chaos: there would be no moral stability in the universe.

But the opposite of this is the truth. Because

God is righteous He cannot deal with sin in this light and easy way. Did not Christ say:—"Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled". (Matt. v. 18). "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. xii. 36).

Now that is a very solemn thing. It is solemn to recollect that no single sin, of any moral creature, can ever pass, without receiving its due meed of punishment. Righteousness requires this. If God do not thus maintain His laws inviolate, He ceases to be righteous; He can no longer govern among His creatures; His creatures would know that His laws did not mean what they said, and those laws would be treated with contempt; or, enforcing them, sometimes, when He chose, and at other times not, He would be an arbitrary and unreasonable tyrant. God thus being uncertain and variable, He would be disrespected by His own creatures, and the universe would be in disorder.

But some one will say, How is it, then, that free forgiveness is proclaimed in the gospel? Ah! that is what the cross explains. To speak after the manner of men, God was faced with this difficulty; He loved the sinner, but absolutely could not make nothing of his sin! Here was the dilemma; and the way out was found in the gift of His Son, to become incarnate, and in human nature to actually bear, suffer and undergo the punishment due to all my sins. There are two

remarkable expressions used to convey to us what God's nature is: "God is love" (1 John iv. 8), but also—" God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John i. 5). Light in His nature demands that all darkness and sin should be banished far from His presence. No one with a spot of sin can come near Him. Indeed, with a spot of sin upon us, we should not want to; our desire would be to flee far away from that light which we could not endure.

Yet His heart of love yearned to have the sinner in His own home. And He has found out and provided a way whereby it may be done, and that is this-" Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God " (1 Pet, iii. 18). But to understand this, we must understand something of the person of Christ. If He had been only man, however righteous and perfect, His death would have been no adequate sacrifice for the sins of millions of human beings. Could an angel—the highest—the archangel—have offered himself-his life was not his own to give; but if given, would be utterly insufficient. Moreover, as Governor of the universe, God could not compound with His creatures for infractions of His laws. His laws would not then be safeguarded from being broken again; for it would be open to another at a future time to take the risk of breaking law, knowing that he or some one else for him, might offer that which would satisfy the Almighty for his crime. It thus seems plain that God could not accept aught from His

creatures in satisfaction for rebellion.

What then was to be done? Could God leave sin unpunished, and so have His character tarnished, as One who can be complacent with evil? No! whatever happens, God must maintain His own glory unsullied. But the love that could love unworthy sinners found out a way for their salvation. What the creature could not do, God Himself has done. The Father gave the Son, and the Son in love and compassion undertook the task. He became incarnate in order to offer, in the nature of man, that which the offended Majesty of heaven could accept. And this was no makebelieve. He underwent the wrath of God due to sin. Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree. Look at the garden of Gethsemane! He asks, implores, that if it were possible, the cup which even He so dreaded, might pass from Him. He was not yet drinking the cup, the cup of the fearful wrath of God against sin, but the mere anticipation made Him sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. It was not the human sufferings that made propitiation for sin; not the scourge, or the nails, or the mocking; these were sufferings from man for righteousness. Far, far beyond all these He suffered upon the cross from God for sin, "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. v. 21). No creature could have borne the wrath of God against sin; but He being God as well as man, could do so; and the glory of His

person gave to the sacrifice a value that was not only profound but infinite.

Now, if ever it could have been possible for God to waive a scintilla of His righteousness, it would have been done then, at the petition of His when were an impossibility. You might sooner see the sun drop from the centre of our system and leave us all in darkness and confusion. The law of gravitation could more. easily be abandoned than God swerve a hair's breadth from His righteousness. Listen to the agonising supplication in Gethsemane-" O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39). And he went away again the second time, and prayed, saying:-" O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (ver. 44). Then He went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same thing (ver. 44). Then He arises, and goes with calmness and matchless dignity through all the horrors of that hour; the lacerations of the Roman scourge, from which arone the criminal sometimes expired; the mocking crown of thorns, the ribaldry of the soldiers, the spitting on Him, the smiting on the face, the derisive bowing of the knee, the questionings before Pilate, to whom He calmly says:-" Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above " (John xix. 11).

How majestically meek stands His figure through these scenes! And yet all this was only preliminary—only the vestibule of the suffering for sin which He must yet enter upon. For this was not suffering for sin: this was suffering from man for righteousness. It was upon the cross alone that He bore our sins; and even then it was not the nailing, or the thirst-these were human inflictions. Beyond and above all this, Jehovah laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The largest human mind can never conceive what He had to undergo in meeting and bearing the righteous wrath of God against sin. This it was that wrung from Him the cry: " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The cross of Christ stands the eternal witness that the righteousness of God can be neither waived nor abated. If, therefore, God and the sinner once meet in judgment, there can be but one result condemnation; and if guilt is irremovable, except by the blood of Christ, it follows that punishment and banishment from God must be eternal

But besides being the witness of divine and eternal righteousness, the cross of Christ is also the witness of God's unfathomable love. For why was Christ permitted to be crucified? Not for any sins of His own, for He had none. But what we behold there, is the only righteous man who ever lived, suffering for sin upon the cross: the only righteous man, forsaken by the ever righteous God! We know well the solution of the riddle:—" 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 "(Isaiah liii. 5). Oh! what love in Him to go through all this in order to provide a way of escape for unworthy, thankless sinners! And what love in God to give His Son,—"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16).

The righteousness of God is a solemn fact. The shallow system of thought called New Theology has no means of meeting it; but Gethsemane and Calvary are God's public warning to mankind, that the claims of His righteousness have to be met. If they could in any way be escaped or cheated, the Son of God would never have been sent down into this world of ours. But at Calvary He satisfied for the believer every claim which justice has against him, and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth us (believers) from all sin. Thrice happy they who are under the shelter of that blood; terrific will be the awakening of those who are so foolish as to think that they can shuffle through or cheat the claims of divine justice.

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