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SPRUCE STREET LECTURES.



ON THE
NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT.



BY REV. CHARLES HODGE. - 1878



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SPRUCE STREET LECTURES.

LECTURE VI.

*Delivered on the Evening of the 5th February, 1832, by the
Rev. Charles Hodge, of Princeton, N. J.*

NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT.

"When we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son."—*Rom. v. 10.*

THE truth that man is a moral, and consequently an accountable being, is the foundation of all religion. It is necessarily involved in this truth, that our happiness depends on the favour of God, and that this favour is forfeited by sin. Just so far, and so clearly, therefore, as men are conscious of sin, are they convinced that they are the objects of the divine displeasure. As the consciousness of sin is universal, so also is the apprehension of God's anger. The question, therefore, forces itself on the attention of every considerate human being, with an energy and importunity which cannot be resisted, How is the favour of God to be regained? The answer to this question decides the religious character and the destiny of him who gives it. For, if he is mistaken here, if he adopts a wrong method of securing this object, he is, on his own principles, undone.

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Here, then, more immediately than any where else, are we in contact with the vital principle of religion. For as there can be no real happiness, so there can be no holiness except in the enjoyment of God's favour, (*Rom.* vi. 14), and consequently there can be no true religion where the method of securing his favour, whatever that may be, is denied or neglected. Such being confessedly the importance of this question, it need hardly be remarked, that this of all others is the subject on which mere speculation and theorizing should be forborne. When a man is seeking for himself a footing on which he can stand alone in the presence of his God, or on which he is willing to assume the responsibility of exhorting others to stand, he needs, if ever, the rock of the divine testimony beneath his feet.

Happily we are not left in uncertainty on this subject. There is no one doctrine of the Bible more frequently asserted, more variously implied, more intimately interwoven with all the rest, than that which teaches the method of regaining the forfeited favour of God. The declaration is so explicit, and so frequently repeated, that we are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, that no class of men, professing to recognize the authority of the Scriptures, venture to deny that it is in some way through the death of Christ this result is secured. But the question here arises, what is the nature of this connexion—how is it that the sufferings of the Son of God secure the remission of sins? It must be admitted that there is no little diversity of opinion as to the answer which should be given to this question. But why need the question be agitated? Why not be contented with the general statement, we are saved by the death of Christ, without perplexing ourselves or others by inquiring how these events are related? We should be

at a loss for an answer to these interrogations, and feel ready to admit that all such inquiries are worse than useless, if the Bible was silent on the subject. Did the Scriptures teach us the fact only, that the death of Christ is connected with the pardon of sin, without explaining the nature or mode of that connexion, then indeed would inquiry on the subject be vain, if not impious. But this is not the case. The manner in which the sufferings of the Redeemer are connected with our salvation, is as much revealed as the object of our faith and ground of our hope, as the fact itself. Besides, this question is most intimately connected with all true piety. If the death of Christ has no other connexion with the remission of sins, than as it confirms his doctrines, then must our views of the divine character, of the ground of a sinner's confidence towards God, of the nature of faith, and mode of salvation, all be changed; then have we another Gospel; and all those exercises of piety, which suppose a different view of this subject, are fanatical delusions. We are not, therefore, travelling beyond the limits of revealed truth, nor instituting an inquiry unconnected with practical religion, when we ask, How it is that the death of Christ secures the remission of sins? Various as are the opinions entertained on this subject, they may all, it is believed, be reduced to these three general views.

The first is that which represents the death of Christ, not as the immediate or proximate ground of pardon, but as securing this result only so far as it is instrumental in producing a change of character in the sinner himself. Its tendency to effect this change is ascribed either to the confirmation which it gives to the Gospel in the general, or to some one truth in particular; to the exhibition which it makes of the divine mercy, or the excellence of the Re-

deemer ; or to some more mysterious and undefinable influence. The effect, however, in what ever way it may be produced, is on the sinner himself, and it is in virtue of this effect that pardon is secured. According to this view, every constituent idea of the doctrine of Atonement is rejected, and Christianity is either a modified system of natural religion, or of mystical philosophy.

The second general view proceeds on the assumption, that as the end of punishment is the prevention of crime, if this end can be otherwise attained, the obstacle to the exercise of mercy would be removed. The death of Christ is designed to accomplish this object, by making an impression on the intelligent universe at least as efficacious in deterring from sin, as the punishment of the actual offender would have produced. Such being the object of the Atonement, it consists in sufferings not of a penal character, nor inflicted in the execution of the law, but endured under circumstances adapted to produce the desired impression. Its effect is to remove a governmental difficulty to the dispensation of pardons.

The third view proceeds on the principle, that the necessity of punishment does not arise merely out of the necessity of making an impression on the universe, and on the sinner himself, adapted to deter from sin, but also and primarily out of the inherent ill-desert of sin itself, and the infinite rectitude of the divine character, in which the idea of distributive justice is included. Consequently, while the Atonement is designed and adapted to produce the deepest impression of the holiness and justice of God on all intelligent beings, its primary object is to answer the demands of divine justice. It is, therefore, of the nature of a satisfaction, consisting in vicarious punishment, or in the infliction

of the penalty of the law on Jesus Christ as the substitute of the sinner. And its effect is to secure reconciliation on the condition of faith and repentance.

It is the object of this discourse to endeavour to show that the third of these views is the form in which the doctrine is presented in the word of God. Before entering on the subject, it may be necessary to state the sense in which the terms here employed are used. When it is said, the sufferings of Christ were of the nature of punishment, the word punishment is used in its ordinary acceptation, for suffering judicially inflicted, or sufferings imposed in execution of a legal sentence. The idea, of course, is not included, that the sufferer himself must be chargeable with sin in a moral sense. This would be no less abhorrent to the feelings of those who use this expression, than inconsistent with the plainest declarations of Scripture. Again, when it is said that the penalty of the law was executed on the Redeemer, it is not intended that his sufferings were, either in nature or degree, any more than in duration, the same as would have come on the sinner himself. Such an idea is not necessarily, nor properly, conveyed by the expression. The penalty of the law is not any specific degree or character of pain which the law imposes, but it is any and all pain, which sustains to the law the relation of a sanction. Thus, the word death, according to its scriptural use, does not import any one definite form or amount of suffering, but all evil, however varied in nature or intensity, by which sin is punished. Even with regard to human laws, the penalty never involves precisely the same kind and degree of pain in its execution. The terms may remain the same, but the character and amount of suffering are modified by ten

thousand circumstances in the moral character, natural temperament, and physical constitution of the individual. A youth of tender feelings, susceptible conscience, alive to the good opinion of society, with fair prospects and many friends, suffers unspeakably more and differently under the same sentence, than a hardened offender differently circumstanced in all these respects. It is, therefore, of all objections, the least worthy of notice, that Christ's sufferings were not penal, because they were not the same in character as those which the actual sinner would have experienced. There may be even an entire commutation of the punishment, without the penal character of the infliction being lost.

We cling to these expressions, not from any fondness for terms, but because those which we are urged to substitute for them do not express the idea we mean to convey. It is, therefore, in the sense just stated, we maintain, in accordance with the language of the Scriptures, that Christ suffered the penalty of the law. The law threatened death—and Christ suffered death—in the proper scriptural meaning of the term; that is, misery or pain judicially inflicted in support of the claims of the law.

The definition of the phrase vicarious punishment, we give in the words of a modern Lutheran divine.* “It is suffering judicially inflicted on condition of the exemption of the actual offender.” It derives its character from its being judicially substituted for the punishment of the real transgressor, with a view to his pardon. The correctness of this definition is evident from the nature of the transaction, and from all the examples and illustrations of vicarious

* Storr, Object of the Death of Christ.

sufferings recorded in the Scriptures. It is true, the exemption of the offender need not be, and in the case before us, is not, absolute and immediate, but may be suspended on any condition the judge and substitute have pleased to determine.

Christ, then, saves us from the penalty of the law by vicariously suffering that penalty in his own person. That this is the doctrine of the Word of God, on this subject, we think can easily be shown, if the two following principles of interpretation be admitted, and faithfully applied. The first is, that as the sacred writers unquestionably meant to be understood by the persons to whom they wrote, they must have employed the terms which they use in the sense which they knew would be attached to them by their readers or hearers, and, consequently, that the business of an interpreter is to ascertain the sense in which the cotemporaries of the sacred writers employed the terms these writers used, and the mode in which they would naturally conceive the doctrines which they presented. In doing this, he ascertains the mode in which the inspired penmen meant to be understood; and the mode in which we are bound to receive their meaning. This simple rule lies at the foundation of all certainty in the interpretation of written documents, ancient or modern.

The other principle is, that although it is not only proper in itself, but absolutely necessary in a teacher to accommodate himself to the capacity, the modes of thinking and speaking of his hearers, it is not consistent with fidelity or honesty to employ such a mode of instruction as would naturally lead them into error; or, by adopting their false opinions, to confirm and sanction them. Much less would such a course be consistent with the character of inspired

teachers, and least of all when teaching the plan of salvation. We are, therefore, never at liberty to assume that the sacred writers really meant something different from the obvious import of their language, on the ground of their having accommodated themselves to the opinions of those to whom they wrote. To attempt to draw a distinction between what is exegetically true, and what is doctrinally correct, is at once and entirely to destroy the authority of the Scriptures as a rule of faith. The Scriptures become a mere set of cabbalistic signs for every man to interpret as he pleases. Nothing more is necessary than this principle to enable any one, not only to explain away every doctrine of the Bible, but to make the Scriptures teach any conceivable system of opinions. And in point of fact, they have thus been made to contain every form of doctrine, from icy deism to ideal pantheism; and the Apostles alternately presented as heathen moralists, and mystic philosophers. It is clearly impossible to prove any thing from Scripture, to the satisfaction of those, who either avowedly, or practically, adopt such a principle of interpretation. If we are not to take the simple exegetical meaning of the Bible for its true meaning, then we can never know what its meaning is. Let us, under the guidance of the simple rule of construction, that the sacred writers say what they mean, and mean what they knew their readers would understand them to say, inquire in what way they teach the doctrine of Atonement. That they represent the death of Christ as a vicarious punishment of our sins, we think clear from the following considerations :

I. This doctrine is taught in all those passages in which Christ is said "to bear our sins." Thus, repeatedly, in the

fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He was numbered with the transgressors: and he bare the sins of many." "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." It is our duty simply to inquire, what was the import of this phrase among the ancient Hebrews; what idea did they attach to the expression, "to bear sin," for this must be the idea which the sacred writer meant to convey. This point is easily decided, as the phrase is one of frequent occurrence in the Scriptures. Thus, in *Levit.* v. 1, it is said of the man who gives false testimony, "he shall bear his iniquity." As an equivalent expression in the next verse, it is said of him who touches any thing unclean, "he also shall be guilty." In v. 17, he who violates the law, though he does it ignorantly, "yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity." In chap. vii. 18, he that eateth of a peace-offering on the third day, "shall bear his iniquity." So, xvii. 16, he that does not wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh after eating any thing torn by a wild beast, "shall bear his iniquity." *Numb.* ix. 13, he that does not partake of the passover "shall be cut off from among his people—he shall bear his sins." This expression is sometimes interchanged (and thereby explained) with the phrase "he shall die," "he shall be cut off from among the people," (*Numb.* xix. 19.) or, "he shall be guilty." In all the numerous passages, therefore, in which these words occur in reference to men, the meaning is obvious and uniform, for a man to bear his sins, is to bear the blame of them, to be punished for them. And, accordingly, to bear the sins of another, is to bear the blame of them—to be punished for them. So, in *Numb.* xiv. 33, Jeremiah's *Lam.* v. 7, and *Ezek.* xviii. 19, 20,

“The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son, but the soul that sinneth it shall die.” Where the sense is too obvious to be at all questionable. That this is the meaning of the phrase as applied to Christ, by the prophet, is not only evident from the constant usage of the Bible, but from the prophet’s own explanation, “to bear our sins,” is to bear our sorrows, stripes, sickness, chastisement; that is, our punishment. It is to be afflicted, wounded, smitten, and that of God, for our sins. It is plain, too, from its use in the sacrificial services. After the imposition of hands, and confession, *i. e.* after the act of substitution, and the symbolical transfer of sin, the dying victim was said to bear the sins of the offerer. And, finally, the same thing is evident from the admitted opinions of ancient nations in reference to this subject. The case, indeed, is so plain, that the interpretation just given has secured the assent of all impartial commentators, orthodox or infidel. One of the most distinguished of the latter class, remarks on this phrase, “If we wish to understand such expressions, we must revert to the opinion of all early nations, and especially of the Hebrews, that all calamities, particularly those of more than ordinary severity, were punishments inflicted immediately by God, and that they could only be removed by an innocent victim undergoing the punishment as a substitute, and thus stilling the anger of the offended Deity.”* Another of the same class, says, in reference to representations contained in this chapter, (*Isa. liii.*) “The majority of Hebrew readers, having their minds filled with the ideas of sacrifice and substitution, must, of necessity, have so understood these pas-

* Martini on Isaiah, liii.

sages ; and it is not to be doubted, that the mode in which the apostles presented the atoning death of Christ, rests mainly on this ground.”* It is, therefore, with the fullest authority of scriptural usage, Grotius asserts, that, “To bear sins by suffering, that others may be pardoned, can mean nothing else than to bear the punishment of those sins.”† And Archbishop Magee, though he is willing, for the sake of peace, to give up the word punishment, says, “But it is evident, that it (the suffering of Christ) is, notwithstanding, a judicial infliction;”‡ the very idea which the word is intended to express.

Although, therefore, the expression, “to bear sin,” may to our ears, mean either, 1st, to remove it; 2d, to suffer on the occasion of it; or, 3d, to suffer its punishment; to the Jews, it could in such connexions, convey only the last idea, and consequently, to substitute for this either of the two former, is to make it express a sense, which, as we have shown, is contrary to Scripture usage, the opinions of the people to whom the prophet wrote, and therefore contrary to the obvious intention of the sacred writer, and mind of the Spirit.

It is in this sense, too, the New Testament writers, in addressing those “whose minds were filled with the ideas of sacrifice and substitution,” who were imbued with the ideas and language of the Old Testament, assert that Christ “was offered to bear the sins of many,” *Hebrews ix. 28*, that he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” 1 *Peter ii. 24*. So in *John i. 29*, “Behold the Lamb of God which beareth the sin of the world,” (according to the reading of the margin), and 1 *John iii. 5*, “He was manifested to bear our sins.”

* Gesenius on Isaiah liii.

† Grotii Opera Theologia, vol. iv. p. 300.

‡ On the Atonement, vol. i. p. 347. See also p. 346.

II. Precisely the same idea is clearly expressed by the apostle in *Gal.* iii. 13. In this chapter the apostle is engaged in proving, that faith in Christ is the only means by which we can attain the favour of God. One of his arguments is the following: "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." But "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one who hangeth on a tree." It will of course be admitted that "the curse of the law," is its penalty, and that to be under this curse, and to be 'a curse' mean the same thing, the apostle himself teaches, as he substitutes for both expressions, the word "cursed." We are "under the curse," because it is written, "cursed," &c. and Christ was "made a curse," for it is written "cursed, &c. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the literal meaning of this passage is, 'no one can be saved by obedience to the law, because, as the law demands perfect obedience, he who violates the least commandment is exposed to its penalty; but Christ has redeemed us from this penalty by bearing it in our stead.' It hardly seems possible to interpret the apostle's language in any other way. That Christ was properly considered as suffering a penalty, the apostle confirms by appealing to a declaration of the law, that every one judicially condemned was accounted accursed of God, (as the expression is in the passage quoted, *Deut.* xxi. 23,) *i. e.* exposed as an object of divine displeasure; one on whom, by the divine law, a penalty has fallen. So far, therefore, is this reference to the Old Testament from explaining away the previous assertion, that it is intended to confirm it. According to the doctrine of the apostle, then,

we are saved from the penalty of the law, by Christ bearing it in our stead. And this seems to be the ground of his arguing so often that Christ's death is tantamount to our death, and that it is not by the relaxation of the law, as to its penalty, but by its execution that we are saved, "For I, by the law, am dead to the law," *Gal. ii. 19. i. e.* free from its demands, so that there is now no condemnation to me, nor to any who are in Christ Jesus.

III. *Rom. viii. 3.* The same course of reasoning occurs in *Rom. viii. 3.* "The salvation which men in vain look for through the law, God has secured in another way. For as the law was insufficient, God having sent his Son in a nature the same with our own, and as a sin offering punished sin in him, that thus the demands of the law might be satisfied by us." This seems to be the view of the passage best suited to the context, and the peculiar expressions which the apostle here employs. In this passage God is said to have sent his Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh," and it was in this flesh, (or nature) "that he punished or condemned sin," not in our flesh, for this the context will not allow, but in the flesh in which his Son appeared, *i. e.* in his person, and the object of this vicarious condemnation is our exemption.

IV. The same representation is found in *2 Cor. v. 21.* The apostle had stated "that God was reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;" and then states how it is that pardon was thus secured; "God made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He treated the Redeemer as though he were the sinner—that

we might be treated as though we were righteous." As, "to be made the righteousness of God," means to be justified, so, "to be made sin," is to be condemned or made subject to the penalty of the law. As we are not constituted morally righteous, by the death of Christ, so is it infinitely far from the apostle's intention to say, that Christ was made, morally, a sinner. Both expressions are obviously used in their usual forensic sense.

V. We may now refer to those numerous passages in which Christ is said, "to die for us," "to suffer the just for the unjust," &c. These texts all prove the doctrine of substitution, *i. e.* that Christ died in our stead. It is true that taken by itself this expression might mean nothing more than that Christ suffered for our benefit, but the following reasons seem sufficient to prove that this is not all the sacred writers mean by it. 1. One of the prepositions (*ἀντὶ*) thus translated, seldom has any other meaning than, "in the place of." 2. In some connexions this sense is required, as when it is said, "he gave his life a ransom for many," where the force of the word ransom, requires the last words to be rendered, 'in the place of many.' 3. In *Rom. v. 7*, it is said "scarcely for a righteous man will one die," which seems clearly to mean, in the place of a righteous man; and, therefore, when it is said, "but when we were yet sinners Christ died for us," it must mean, in our place. 4. The very expression, to die for a man, who is exposed to death, that he may live, seems with sufficient clearness to express the idea of dying in his stead. 5. The manner in which the death of Christ is said to benefit us, requires this interpretation—it is by bearing our sins—being made a curse for us, *i. e.* enduring the punishment we had in-

curred. 6. Finally: If the sacred writers clearly elsewhere teach, as we have seen they do, the doctrine of legal substitution; then, as their meaning is ascertained as to this point by passages which are obvious as to their import, it can be no longer doubtful what they intended when they declare that Christ "died for us."

VI. Another important class of text is that in which Christ is called a ransom, and his work a redemption. It is freely admitted that the words "to redeem" and "redemption" are often used when merely the general idea of deliverance is meant to be conveyed. As when God is said to have redeemed his people out of Egypt. Their primary and proper meaning, however, as is on all hands admitted, is to deliver by the payment of a ransom. That it is in this, and not in the more general sense of mere deliverance, they are used in reference to the work of Christ, is evident from the simple consideration that the ransom, or price paid for our deliverance, is expressly stated. Thus in *Eph.* i. 7, "In whom we have redemption through his blood." *1 Cor.* vi. 20. "Ye are bought with a price." *1 Peter* i. 18, 19. "Ye are not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish." *Gal.* iii. 13. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us." In all these cases, it is not mere deliverance that is asserted, but deliverance by a specific method; by a ransom, by the payment of a price. It is true these and all similar representations are figurative, but figurative language is often as intelligible as literal, and sometimes more so. The simple question is, what idea would this language naturally excite in the minds of men accus-

tomed to regard their sacrifices as ransoms, and familiar with the mode of deliverance which these expressions properly describe? It is impossible that this mode of representation should fail of exciting the idea of deliverance on the ground of a satisfaction. This Christ and his Apostles knew; and this idea, therefore, they must have intended to convey.

VII. We may appeal to the frequently recurring passages in which Christ is said to propitiate God, or to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; or to be himself a propitiation, which all imply that the object of the atonement is to satisfy divine justice. God is represented as angry with the wicked, and the death of Christ, as the means by which he is propitiated. As anger among men is commonly a modification and expression of malice, we know that from association these expressions are apt to excite ideas derogatory to the divine perfection, and furnish an easy topic of declamatory misrepresentation. But it should be remembered, that these are scriptural expressions, expressions intended to convey important truth, and to represent ideas, which, so far from being inconsistent with divine excellence, necessarily enter into the conception of infinite perfection. The anger of God is the expression of his disapprobation of sin; the exhibition of his holiness in view of moral evil; or, in other words, the manifestation of his justice. It is to turn off from us this anger, by rendering our pardon consistent with the justice of the divine Being, that Christ died. And this is expressed in the terms just mentioned. For when God is said to reconcile the world unto himself, or we to be reconciled to him, (in such connexions,) the idea is not that we are led to lay aside our

enmity towards him, but that this favour is propitiated for us, as the word means, 'to restore to the favour of any one.' It is thus used, in the command of our Saviour, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, first go and be reconciled to thy brother," *i. e.* first go and satisfy him and regain his favour. And in *Rom.* v. 10. "In whom we have obtained reconciliation," *i. e.* restoration to the the divine favour. In the phrase "making reconciliation for sin," *Heb.* ii. 17, it, of course, can have no other meaning. That this is the sense of these expressions is further evident from the means by which this reconciliation is effected, it is "by the death of his Son," by his cross, by Christ being made sin for us.

VIII. The only other class of texts to which our limits will permit us to refer, is perhaps the largest and most important of all. The work of Christ is at least more fully illustrated, if not more frequently expressed, by a reference to the sacrifices of the Old Testament than in any other way. He is called the Lamb of God, *John* i. 19, a propitiation, or propitiatory sacrifice, *Rom.* iii. 24, a sin offering *Rom.* viii. 5, an acceptable sacrifice, *Eph.* v. 2. He is declared and proved to be a Priest, *Heb.* v. and all the duties of the office are ascribed to him, the sacrifice, which he offered, was himself. "He offered himself without spot unto God," *Heb.* ix. 12. "He was once offered to bear the sins of many," *Heb.* ix. 28. He offered a sacrifice for sin, "once when he offered up himself," *Heb.* vii. 27. The effects of his sufferings are in like manner described in terms borrowed from the sacrificial services. "Having by himself purged our sins," *Heb.* i. 3. If the blood of bulls and of goats was of any avail, "how much more shall the blood

of Christ purge your consciences for dead works," *Heb.* ix. 14. "He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," *Heb.* ix. 26. "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ," *Heb.* x. 10. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin," *1 John* i. 7. All these expressions refer, not to moral purification, but to the removal of the guilt of sin, by atonement. So also the mode of application of the benefits of his death is expressed, by sprinkling his blood on the conscience, to indicate its pardoning efficacy; or on the throne of God, as expressive of its influence in propitiating the divine favour. Is it conceivable that such representations, made not casually, or by allusion, but dwelt upon, urged, defended and argued, could fail to produce in the minds of those, who from their youth had been familiar with sacrificial rites, the conviction that the sacred writers meant to teach, that Christ was really a sacrifice in their sense of the term, that his death saves us from the penalty of the law in the same way as the sacrifices of the old dispensation saved the Jews from the consequences of the transgression of the law of Moses? If this be admitted, then must we admit, that the sacred writers intended to produce this conviction. For who will maintain they designedly led their readers into error; that inspired men were intentional deceivers while propounding the method of salvation.

In what light, then, are the sacrifices of the Old Testament presented in the Scriptures? We are clearly taught that they sustained a two-fold relation; the one to the theocratical polity of the Jewish state, and the other to the great truths which were afterwards to be revealed. In the former respect, we learn, in the first place, that they were concerned about God, designed to propitiate his favour, and thus secure

the pardon of sin; and in the second that this was effected through the medium of vicarious punishment. Both of these points seem evident from the language, rites, and opinions of the ancient Hebrews, and the ancient world in general. The design of these services, is, indeed, clearly indicated by the expressions to propitiate, make reconciliation for, and others of similar import, as already remarked; and the nature of the observance shows how this was to be accomplished. When a man had violated any of the laws of Moses, the penalty was excision from among the people. The method prescribed by the judge and head of the Jewish state for averting this evil, was to present a victim to suffer in his place. But suffering, judicially imposed on one with the view to the exemption of another, is the definition of vicarious punishment. This idea of substitution and transfer of sin, was clearly expressed by the imposition of hands and confession of sin over the head of the sacrifice. And hence, after this ceremony, the victim was said to bear the sins of the offender, *i. e.* to bear the blame or guilt of them, and being thus laden, was considered unclean, and, at times, burnt without the camp, and all who touched it were regarded as defiled. All this to be sure is figurative, but these figures are designed to teach something, to teach that pardon was to be obtained only through the medium of vicarious punishment. This is the essential, formal idea of a sin-offering. In the language of Grotius, "They secured pardon, by inducing God to forgive, on the ground of a satisfaction." p. 330. Such being the obvious nature and import of those rites in relation to the Mosaic ceremony, their connexion with the Christian dispensation is not less clear, and far more important. As typical institutions, they were designed to teach by significant actions,

by prefiguring, to predict and explain the method of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was to bear the sins of the world. Their own efficacy, in securing pardon, did not extend beyond the mere ceremonial and civil penalties of the old dispensation. As it was impossible that the blood of bulls or of goats could take away sin, they had no bearing on the relation of the offender to God as Judge and moral governor of the universe. But if, as the Apostle reasons, they availed to the purifying of the flesh, to the removal of mere external disabilities, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, possessed of an eternal spirit, *i. e.* a divine nature, offered himself unto God, avail to the pardon of sin. In the comparisons so frequently instituted between Christ and the ancient sacrifices, it is to be remarked that it is not the result or effect merely that is taken into view. He is called a sacrifice, not merely because he secures pardon, but the mode in which this is done is the very point of the comparison; he is a sacrifice, because he takes our place, bears our sins, is made a curse for us, and thus propitiates God in our behalf. All the ideas, therefore, of substitution, legal transfer of sin, vicarious punishment, and propitiation, which enter into the Jewish idea of a sacrifice are, over and over, asserted to meet in the great atonement by Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, in the Jewish sense of the term, that he is called a sacrifice for sin.

It is easy, indeed, to get over all this, by simply substituting for the ancient view of sacrifices, our own idea of what they were, or ought to have been. To assert that they were merely symbols, or signs of God's disapprobation of sin, designed to exhibit and impress that truth on the minds of all concerned; and thence infer that in this sense, and to

this extent, Christ was a sacrifice. Or, as others have done, maintain that they were only intended to make the sinner feel his guilt, and assure him of pardon, and then limit the death of Christ to the same objects. This, however, is interpreting Scripture not according to the views of its writers, but according to our own views of the nature and fitness of things. It is not taking the sense of the Bible as we find it, but interposing a sense of our own. It is obvious if we once abandon the rule of interpretation so often referred to, if we do not understand the Bible in the way in which the inspired writers knew they would be understood by their readers; then are we far and hopelessly at sea, without a star to guide us. One man has as good a right to interpose his sense of the terms of Scripture as another; one may as well say, a sacrifice was designed to impress the offerer, as another it was intended to impress spectators. Which is right, or whether either, is a matter to be debated at the bar of reason; and the plan of salvation is made to await the decision. Our only hope of any solid foundation for faith, or of any security for truth, is to receive the Scriptures in the sense which they were designed and adapted to convey to the minds of their original readers.*

When, Christian Brethren, we remember that the representations just given, are not casual or incidental, but that they pervade the sacred volume, are insisted upon, illustrated, established and defended, made the grounds of doctrinal and practical inferences; when we remember, that Christ is said to have borne the punishment of our sins, in the plainest terms the language of the Old Testament admits of; that he

* The limitations to which this principle is subject, do not affect the view here given.

was made sin, or treated as a sinner in our place; that he bore the curse of the law; that he died in our stead; that he gave his life as our ransom; bought us with his blood; that he propitiated God on our behalf, and saved us as a sacrifice; can we hesitate to admit that the very constituent idea of atonement is vicarious punishment.

This doctrine, thus clearly taught in the word of God, has an advocate even in natural conscience; for this is the light in which sacrificial rites have been viewed in all ages, and among all people, Gentiles as well as Jews. No matter how various the offerings, nor how diversified the ceremonies, the object of such rites was the satisfaction of divine justice, and the means, vicarious punishment. And it may be assumed that this is the form in which the doctrine presents itself to every pious unsophisticated reader of the Bible. When oppressed with a sense of sin, he feels that some atonement must be made to God. The attribute which leads Him to punish, the convinced sinner sees to be perfectly lovely and excellent, and it is not until he discovers some method by which the exercise of mercy can be reconciled with justice, that pardon appears possible. Such a method he finds revealed in the cross of Christ. There he sees that the penalty of the broken law has been endured in his stead. It is this that reconciles him so cordially to the Gospel, and enables him to embrace, without any misgivings, the offers of mercy there presented. It is not until he has been taught by others, what is called, the philosophy of the subject, that he is led to imagine all this is a delusion, that the atonement, instead of being designed as a satisfaction or propitiation to God, is intended either to impress his own heart, or to symbolize a general truth for the instruction of the universe. And even when thus in-

structed, he reverts in his ordinary exercises of faith and devotion to the scriptural representations of the subject. This too, let me add, is the form in which the doctrine has been held in the Christian Church from first to last. For although during the ages in which the Scriptures were buried, many absurd ideas were entertained on this subject; yet when the Reformation brought them again to light; this was the doctrine which burst with redeeming brightness from the sacred pages. Much and bitterly as the men of that day disputed about other points, in this they were agreed. Lutherans and Calvinists, the Hugonots of France and the Reformed of Holland, the Scotch Presbyterians and English Reformers, all conspired to represent this as the cardinal doctrine of the Gospel, the article of a rising or a falling Church.

The Atonement, then, Christian Brethren, as exhibiting the mode of the sinner's salvation, is the characteristic doctrine of the Gospel. Its direct object is the reconciliation of men to God. To secure pardon of sin, the sanctification of their nature, and eternal life. In this light, who can comprehend the importance of the work of Christ! Let any one endeavour to estimate the value of these results in the case of any one individual. Let him ask, what it is for one soul to be delivered from hell and raised to heaven; to be freed from eternal degradation and misery, and raised to eternal purity and happiness; let him strain his powers to the utmost to take in the full blessedness of such a redemption. And when he finds how vain is the effort, let him ask himself what he ought to think and feel in view of the ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands redeemed out of every nation, and kindred, and tongue under the whole heaven, a multitude which no man can

number, whose robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb.

Inconceivably great as is the amount of blessedness thus effected, its accomplishment is not the sole object of the death of Christ. The rays from the cross are cast far onward to the utmost verge of the universe of God. Wherever there are immortal minds to see or learn the exhibition here made of the divine character, there do the effects of the atonement reach. So far from supposing that the view of the subject, which we have endeavoured to present, excludes the idea of a moral impression on the world of intelligent spirits, we consider that the Atonement derives its adaptedness to produce this impression, from the fact of its being a satisfaction to divine justice. When that most wonderful of all commands was heard in heaven, "Awake, O sword, against the man that is mine equal, saith the Lord," then was it seen and felt, that though heaven and earth should perish, the law of God must stand; that sin was indeed an evil so enormous that to pass it with impunity was impossible. Only so far as the atonement involves an exercise of justice, is it a manifestation of justice. Viewed in the light, not of setting aside the penalty of the law, but as involving its execution, it is better adapted to seal the conviction on all minds of the immutability of the law, and of the certainty of sin being punished, than the eternal condemnation of ten thousand worlds. It is, as the Apostle informs us, the fact that Christ was possessed of an eternal spirit, or divine nature, *Heb.* ix. 14, and thus was equal with God, *Phil.* ii. 8, which gives the Atonement its efficacy. It is this that fills the wondering universe with awe, and constitutes the most effective of all exhibitions of the divine holiness and justice. Whatever moral impression,

therefore, the exhibition of divine justice can produce, is thus most effectually made, and whatever benefit, in deterring from sin, this impression can effect, is thus secured. The law is sustained and vindicated, by being executed; or its transgression, with impunity, by man or seraph, is felt through all worlds to be impossible.

This truth is made to bear with all its force upon the sinner. "If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry,"—if it was not possible that the cup of wrath should pass from the Saviour's lips, from whose lips shall it pass? Where is the man who believes the doctrine of Atonement, who does not feel that his destruction is just and inevitable, if he neglect the salvation of the Gospel? Who does not feel that it is the utmost limits of infatuation to believe that the sinner can escape, if God spared not his own Son?

The ill desert of sin, and the certainty of its punishment, are, however, not the only truths exhibited in the death of Christ. God commendeth his LOVE towards us, in that while we were yet enemies Christ died for us. God so LOVED the world that he sent his Son. It is this attribute which is most conspicuously displayed in the cross of Christ. It is this, therefore, which is the constant theme of praise with the sacred writers; a love whose height, and depth, and length, and breadth, are beyond our knowledge. As it is by the exhibition of truth, and especially of the character of God, that holiness is sustained and exercised in all created minds; so does the Atonement become of all means perhaps the most effective in promoting holiness throughout the whole universe. It is the exhibition here made, which commonly leads men to repentance. It is here they see the evil of sin; the holiness and love of God;

the wonderful grace of their Redeemer. It is here they learn the vileness and ingratitude of their conduct; it is when they look on Him whom they have pierced, that they mourn and turn unto God with contrition and penitence. It is from the cross, too, that the Christian derives his most active impulses to duty and self-denial. Constrained by the love of Christ, Paul laboured and suffered with constancy and alacrity. And it is the same influence which now restrains from sin, and urges on to duty, all faithful followers of the Redeemer. Nor is the effect confined to our world. If, when God spread these garnished heavens, and called these countless worlds, with their endless variety of happy inhabitants into being, a shout of rapture was heard in heaven, at this display of his wisdom, power, and goodness; we need not wonder that the sons of God regard with interest the work of Redemption. It is into the deeper wonders and brighter glories of this new creation, they desire to look; and thence they derive their chief materials of praise. As a means of promoting holiness and happiness, therefore, among all orders of intelligent beings, and throughout all eternity, the cross of Christ is perhaps of all others the most effective.

The effect which the consideration of this doctrine ought to have on Christians, time does not permit us to indicate. Paul tells us, that having such a high Priest, we should hold fast our profession, never be tempted to give up either the faith or hope of the Gospel; that we should come with boldness to the throne of grace; that we should live for Him, who died for us; that, having experienced the unsearchable riches of Christ, we should esteem it the chief business and honour of our lives, to endeavour to bring others to the enjoyment of its blessing; that we should fix

no limits to our desire for the extension of the knowledge of the Saviour, until it covers the earth as the waters do the great deep. We should esteem all sacrifices and all efforts slight for the attainment of this object. Do what we will, suffer what we may, for the salvation of others, it will all be little, compared with what Christ has done and suffered for us. And it will all appear little in our own eyes when we enter in the eternal world.

Though this doctrine has always proved a stumbling block in the way of some, and foolishness in the eyes of others; it is nevertheless the wisdom of God unto salvation. Presenting the plan which infinite wisdom has devised for the redemption of men, it teaches most clearly to those who refuse to accede to its terms, that they make their own destruction sure. The refuges of lies to which they betake themselves will not stand a moment before the coming storm of divine wrath. Their prayers or penances; their deeds of charity or honesty, will avail nothing in averting the sword of divine justice. Rejecting the offering of Christ, there remains no other sacrifice for sin; refusing this Saviour, there is no other name given under heaven whereby they can be saved. The obvious imperative duty of all such, is an immediate return to God through Jesus Christ, a sincere and penitent acquiescence in the plan of salvation proposed in the Gospel. Hear, then, and obey the voice of the dying Saviour from the cross, "Look unto me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved."

And now, unto him who loved us and gave himself for us, be blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, even unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. Amen.