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ARTICLE V.

THE BENEVOLENCE THEORY OF THE
ATONEMENT.BY THE REV. FRANK HUGH FOSTER, PH. D., OBERLIN THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY.

II.

SYSTEMATIC STATEMENT.

IN the former article, the growth of certain component elements of the theory of the atonement has been traced in the principal New England divines. In advancing to a restatement of the theory from its ideal basis, as is now proposed, it should be kept clearly in mind that the object of this article is not the proof, but the statement of the theory. Whatever proof may be given is incidental, and whatever evidence the theory may appear to have when it is once clearly stated, is to be ascribed to the credit of the theory, not to the purpose of the present writer. Doubtless all truth shines by its own light. If there shall seem to be such a light shed upon the subject, the writer will not seek to obscure it, nor on the other hand to enhance it by formal proofs.

The benevolence theory of the atonement rests upon the

spond to the real being without him; and so when he has found the position of a planet in the sky, he points his telescope thither, expecting that it will appear within the field of the instrument. This ideal harmony exists as truly in the spiritual as in the physical world. Knowledge is the harmonious operation of the intellect. Happiness is the conscious harmonious play of all the faculties: on its objective side it is harmony, on its subjective delightful consciousness. Holiness is also harmony. Right moral action will result in harmony. It is itself harmonious in any individual case with all other right action, and with all the ends which right action secures, particularly happiness. It is agreement with right action and happiness; or, as it is itself a choice of the will, its agreement is the agreement of voluntary choice, or, it is the choice of holiness and happiness, which includes the choice of the means necessary to promote these. Hence virtue is the choice of well-being; for well-being is harmony with the universe; and this choice is designated by the term benevolence. It has reference to the harmony of the entire universe, and hence it seeks well-being in general. So that, as a comprehensive expression of the nature of virtue, it may be said that it is general benevolence, or the choice of the well-being of every sentient and moral being as such. And every individual action is virtuous when it is performed under the influence of this great motive, when it seeks the well-being of the individual in its consistency with the well-being of the whole complex of being.

Virtue is thus benevolence, or love of every being according to its worth. It is, in reference to God, love of him with all the heart and mind and strength; in reference to our fellow-men, love of each as ourselves. When this motive of love determines an action, the action is virtuous: when it is absent, the same action, however fit, or just, or merciful, it may be, has no true virtue.

In pursuit of the fundamental conception that the universe is ideally a harmony, it is to be laid down, next, that that which constitutes virtue for man, constitutes it also for God. Upon no other supposition can we know anything about God. If in the material sphere, we are really gaining any knowledge of the stellar universe by following out the necessary presupposition of thought, that the universe is a harmony, we must be able in the moral sphere, when we have found out what virtue is in itself by the necessity of our own thought, to affirm that it is the same for all other creatures, or else the ideal harmony is destroyed; and the same also for God, or else he does not stand in the relation of ideal harmony with the universe, and hence is no part of it. But this annihilates either the universe or God; and in either case annihilates thought, and is utterly impossible.

Virtue then in God consists in general benevolence, or in the choice of the holiness and happiness of the universe, or in the promotion of the well-being of every being under the general relations of that well-being, or in love. And when, for brevity's sake, the word *love* is used in the following statement, it will be in the sense of this general benevolence.

The theory of the atonement resting upon this basis is a *Weltanschauung*. It may therefore naturally begin in the counsels of eternity and consider first the creation as the beginning of those dealings of God with man which he pursues upon the principles of love.

What, then, moved God to create? It must have been

satisfaction, and hence was itself a first manifestation of love, in this case of self-love, which is to be carefully distinguished from selfish love. Hence we see, in actual fact, something of every divine attribute in nature, his infinity shadowed forth in the stellar world stretching into the boundless depths of space, his power displayed in the irresistible forces of the world, higher attributes in the sentient and rudimentarily intellectual animal world, and still higher in man, who is a microcosm, mirroring all the rest, and superadding a moral nature. Thus the created sentient universe is capable of ill or of well-being, of pain or of happiness, and man embraces in his capacities also that of moral right and wrong, or of holiness as well as happiness.

Love, then, in its first, its merely creative operation, has brought into existence a world with which God must stand in moral relations. Capable as it is of harmony, and even of that highest harmony which consists in the harmony of holy choices, God must either choose, or not choose, to promote its well-being. Since he is virtuous, he will put forth a benevolent choice, and hence choose its well-being, or his further relations to it will be governed by the same principles of love which have brought it into being in the precise form which it has taken. Love created: love will govern. What will be the general course which God will therefore pursue?

Not that of deism, which conceives God as forming general laws, and leaving the world to run, like a clock when once wound up. This would not be to promote the holiness of the world, especially when that potent fact of a free will capable of either good or evil action is brought into

Some interference for good may, then, be expected. But how in general shall it be conducted? Natural harmony in the universe will demand that men, like stones or planets, be treated according to their divinely given natures; and love which seeks the well-being of every creature, must equally consult the peculiar nature of every being which it would bless. The essential fact about the nature of man in the ethical sphere is the possession of free will. This will, then, be considered in the determination of methods of dealing with him for the promotion of his holiness. But the nature of the will is that it is not subject to force. Its action is controlled not by physical causes, but by occasions, by influences. If God will promote its right action, he must therefore, so long as he maintains its freedom, that is so long as he conducts his creation upon the principles upon which he first brought it into being, do this by surrounding it with a system of influences which have a tendency to promote such action. Now, love is one; and hence the original principles must be preserved in the sequel of creation. Hence influences will be employed; that is, there will be persuasives to right action and deterrents from wrong. With these must also be connected information upon the nature of actions. These three necessary elements of information, of rewards, and of penalties, are to be attained only in a system of laws,—in fact, constitute by themselves a system of laws. But the promotion of moral action by means of laws is moral government. Hence, in the nature of things, general love demands that man, once created with a moral nature, should be put under a moral government.

of influence for that of positive control. The answer may be made by an appeal to fact. God has given man free will, and now he must conduct his government upon the basis which he has himself thus established. It appears when history is studied upon any large scale, that he is actually governing the course of the world. Thus a system of influences does not lack effectiveness. But we are not left to this explanation alone. It is a matter of daily observation that *men* can exert control over other men by means of influences, to a very large degree. The control is as real as though it were produced by the exertion of force. Given, now, a being of infinite wisdom to apply the infinite resources of persuasion which his omnipotence places at his disposal, and who shall put any limits to his ability to control the course of moral beings without the exercise of physical causation, and without violating in any way their nature? A moral government is a government of moral creatures founded upon love, and conducted by persuasions, but it is not therefore deprived of its governmental character, or prevented from securing that course which in his wisdom God marks out for the moral universe.

But does not God thereby become the author of sin? No! not so long as his sole activity with the sinner is persuasive. In fact, he is thereby shown to be the fountain of all good, for his persuasions are only towards good, since he can act under the system of moral government only according to the principles which prescribed that government, which were principles of love. When the sinner acts, the action is his, the agent's, not that of the being who persuades; and when he acts sinfully, his action is contrary to the persuasion. The author of sin is the man alone.

But was not God then compelled to permit sin? And is not therefore his government destroyed? Possibly, in the best moral system, God could not wisely prevent all sin. In a moral system which should be created for that express pur-

pose, we cannot believe but that God could prevent sin. But in the best moral system, planned for the best results *upon the whole*, possibly God could not, under the limitations which he placed himself in giving free will to men, by degrees of influence which it was on the whole best to exert, positively prevent sin without the co-operation of the creature. That sin exists, is an indication that he could not.

To return now to our consideration of the law and moral government under which man was placed,—How should such a law be communicated? Manifestly, any way which brought it home to man and surrounded it by suitable sanctions, would be appropriate. As a fact, it was communicated by conscience and by revelation. The supernatural character of the revelation had much to do with adding that authority and impressiveness which were necessary to its supreme influence. A more important question for the present theme is, What should be its character? As creation originated in love, and is administered upon principles of love in the establishment of a moral law, so also *what* that law is, must be determined by love. Now, love is essentially love of the morally good, that is, choice and approval of it; and this upon its reverse is hate, or rejection and disapproval of evil. Love seeks to promote that which it chooses, hate to prevent that against which it is directed. The law must, therefore, express these, and their expression is the provision of rewards and punishments. But what punishment shall be provided? Love must again determine. God will be holy, that is, benevolent, in punishing, as in every other act. Hence punishments must be such as shall on the whole promote the happiness of man most effectually.

Thus, by producing both fear of God's wrath and love of his person and character, it will deter man from sin. *A priori* considerations cannot determine how long sin will continue, but revelation shows that it will be eternal.

Thus under the government of God, sin was foreseen and provided for by the enactment of penalties. But, now, when sin had become an actuality by the disobedience of man, what was to be done? On the one hand, to punish sin according to the threatening of the law would be the eternal loss of the entire race, since all had fallen into the condemnation through sin. If man was to be saved, and the ends for which the race was created were to be secured, and if the love of God which sought the holiness and happiness of men forever, was to find free play and to effectuate anything, then man must be released from sin and from the punishment of sin, or he must be forgiven. But how could this be done?

The difficulty in the way of forgiveness may be seen by contemplating the relations of things under the supposition that there was but a single sinner, who was also the only being in the universe but God. It might be thought at first sight that God, as the offended party, could immediately forgive without further question, as the offended party can forgive the offender in human relations. But God's action is determined by love. It has reference to the holiness of the creature. It is thus more than mere private, irresponsible action. Nothing calculated to increase his permanent happiness can be bestowed upon the sinner by God so long as he remains unreconciled, that is, unrepentant, since the promotion of the ultimate happiness of the creature cannot be made without indications of approval, and to give approval of a sinner without demanding repentance would be to approve sin, and so to promote unholiness, the very reverse of the demands of love. Repentance is therefore an indispensable prerequisite of forgiveness. But there are other difficulties in the way. Forgiveness must be granted

in accordance with love, that is in such a way as to promote the holiness of the forgiven. Now, holiness is never consistent with disrespect. It consists in choice, which when directed towards God, is the same as self-surrender to him. A man cannot thus choose God unless he heartily reveres his character. Therefore the character of God, or his love of good and hate of evil, must be maintained in each act which he performs, or the holiness of the creature cannot be promoted in that act. Hence forgiveness must be so imparted that the fundamental hatred of evil and love of good which God feels shall be manifested. There must something be done, therefore as a condition upon which forgiveness rests.

The same thing appears upon a larger scale, but without essential difference, when the great mass of human beings who have fallen into sin and need forgiveness is considered. God has put them under a system of moral influences which are wonderfully adapted to secure their obedience to him, their perfect holiness and happiness. The consequences of this may be drawn out in several heads:—

1. These influences must be manifestly animated by a spirit of love, and themselves be holy and good; for no being could be attracted to holiness or repelled from sin by a system not founded upon holy principles.
2. Equally, they must reveal the character of the being from whom they proceed as holy and good.
3. So far as they assume the character of positive laws, they must be founded in the eternal principles of love of good and hate of evil.
4. As laws, they must possess authority, which involves

1. Here is a system of influences, which reflect the best good of beings, violated without a word of explanation.

2. Here is a being who should love good and hate evil, but who passes over sin without the slightest manifestation of displeasure, and even confers favors upon the transgressor. He is at bottom, then, indifferent to sin and holiness; that is, he is a sinner; and that is, he is not God. Who then is?

3. If the principles upon which laws have been founded are not eternal, and need not receive attention when men are forgiven, then they were, with their threats, mere cruel fulminations, and so wicked.

4. And thus God, if he is longer to be called so, is either weak or wicked.

To forgive under such circumstances, without a condition which should relieve the subject of all these difficulties, would be to break down the whole system of moral influences which were established at the first, or destroy the moral government of God. But this would not be the mere introduction of anarchy: it would be the destruction of God himself, for God, in giving up his government, would give up his holiness, or would destroy himself. It would say in unmistakable language: "The being from whom you have received this so-called moral law, was not actuated by real holy love. He was not truly God." It would introduce a new and positive influence to separate men from God. It would say: "You have yet to seek the true God; and it is your immediate duty to renounce all allegiance to this supposed deity and to set out in search of one who is indeed God."

Thus forgiveness without condition would involve the moral universe and God himself in infinite disorder, which would be the essential destruction both of the universe and of God. In other words, it is an unthinkable thought.

But what shall be the condition? It is marked out by the circumstances of the case. The penalty was not lightly attached to the law, but for certain reasons. Those reasons must be satisfied, or something must be done, which for the purposes of the law, will effect the same which the infliction of the punishment upon the guilty parties would effect. Now, those purposes were, in a word, love. They were the promotion of holiness and happiness by deterring men from sin. If something can be done which shall express as effectually God's displeasure with sin, his determination to maintain his law, the eternal basis in his holy character of the system of moral influences under which he has put men, and shall deter men from sin as completely as the punishment of the guilty would do, then the ends of the law are satisfied, and men may be forgiven. Now, nothing but pain can express displeasure, in this sphere. Therefore, there must be some pain which shall be equivalent, for the purposes had in mind, to the suffering of sinners under the sentence. It must also be entirely safe from any confusion in men's minds with punishment, and hence the sufferer must not deserve it upon his own account. It must be so connected with God that its language shall be unmistakably the language of God himself. And it must be twofold in its effect, like the law itself, in that it must promote holiness positively, while it does it negatively by deterring from sin.

So much human reason, especially when enlightened by the revelation of the fact of the atonement made by the Son of God, can see. But what provision should meet these

he presents within the veil his own blood as an eternal redemption for us. And this sacrifice entirely meets the obligations under which love put itself in the creation and government of man. Thus:—

1. It displays the love of God to man as nothing else could do, when he sends his own Son to such suffering and to death. The goodness of God, and the depths of his desire for, and choice of, the holiness and happiness of man are presented in the strongest form, and the positive requirement made of the condition of forgiveness, that it should offer positive as well as negative motives to holiness, is met in the fullest manner. And in fact, it is the great motive which is found to draw men to God.

2. It thus preserves the character of God in the eyes of the sinner and of the universe. None can charge him with indifference to holiness or to sin who sees him make such a sacrifice before he will forgive a single sinner.

3. It maintains the authority of the law, in that it speaks with unmistakable meaning the determination of God to execute it. If those who love God and are in harmony with him, cannot be forgiven except upon such a sacrifice, what will be the case of the obstinate sinner? Thus it deters from sin as effectually as the threat of the law, and indeed more effectually, for it gives an example in this world of the awful effects of sin, and thus anticipates before the eyes of the universe the execution of the final sentence, otherwise reserved for eternity. And by exhibiting the awful character of sin, it promotes repentance also.

What, now, does it do precisely? Does it do the same thing that the punishment of the sinner would have done? No; but an equivalent. Does it make it obligatory in justice to forgive the sinner? No; but only consistent with the best interests of all concerned to forgive the sinner. The character of God, who as an element in the moral system far surpasses in importance all other elements, is protected; the integrity of the system which he has adopted for the government of moral beings is maintained; the injury which would result from indiscriminate forgiveness to the character of men and angels, is prevented; and thus every obstacle is removed, since God, his creatures, and their relations through the system within which they meet, are the only things there are to consider. It is therefore consistent with the demands of love in its general aspect, after the atonement has been made, to promote the happiness and holiness of the repentant sinner, and thus gratify the demands of love in its particular aspect. Under the atonement there are embraced in one system all the demands of general and specific benevolence.

And now, love positively calls for the forgiveness of the sinner who repents. By repentance he forsakes all sin, and puts forth the fundamental benevolent choice by which he delights in the glory of God, and chooses the well-being of every sentient being according to its worth. This choice is general benevolence. It is in its nature holy; and as it expresses the whole of the moral activity of the repentant man, he is thereby made, so far as his present condition is concerned, entirely holy. It is meet, therefore, since no obstacles arise from the general relations of the matter, that God should approve him. His happiness calls upon God, under the promptings of the divine love, that means be taken which are adapted to its promotion. Since no obstacle intervenes, it is meet that these promptings should be followed; and what is meet upon the whole will, in the per-

fect reign of God, be done. Hence the forgiveness of the repentant sinner, after the atonement is made, is absolutely certain.

Love equally calls for the punishment of the unrepentant sinner. Love of good and hate of evil, considered as volitions, are the same thing. The same love which appoints rewards in the system of moral influences, appoints punishments. The same love which calls for the forgiveness of the repentant, calls for the punishment of the unrepentant. Disagreeing with God, choosing the exact opposite of what he chooses, the unrepentant are not suitable persons to receive his approval or agreement. He cannot agree with those who disagree with him. The interests of other sinners and of holy beings do not permit their forgiveness. Every obstacle removed by the death of Christ in case of the repentant, exists in undiminished force in case of the unrepentant against their forgiveness. And lack of forgiveness is punishment, for lack of approval is disapproval, and divine disapproval is the essence of punishment.

The main elements of the benevolence theory of the atonement are now before us. Summarily the theory may be stated in the following terms:—

THE ATONEMENT IS THAT DIVINE WORK WROUGHT THROUGH THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST, BY WHICH THE LOVE OF GOD, AS CHOOSING GOOD AND REJECTING EVIL, AS MAINTAINING THE SYSTEM OF MORAL INFLUENCES UNDER WHICH HE HAS ONCE PLACED THE RACE FOR ITS DEVELOPMENT, AND AS INVITING THE SINNER TO REPENTANCE AND PROMISING HIM FORGIVENESS, IS EXHIBITED AND EXERCISED.

III.

SUBSIDIARY TOPICS.

For the full understanding of the theory it may be necessary to add certain subsidiary remarks, even at the risk of repeating some suggestions let fall in former pages. Questions will be raised:—

1. As to the relation of justice to atonement and punishment.

Justice is founded in fitness. The mind is so constituted that it perceives relations of fitness between various things, as, for example, pain and sin, happiness and holiness. Since this fitness resides in the nature of things, it is perceived by God as well as by man. God is said to be just, by which is meant that he perceives these natural relations of fitness, and that he never does injustice, or punishes sin with a punishment out of proportion to its guilt. He is sometimes said to have the attribute of justice, but this is an incorrect expression, since the term is applicable only to actions, which are either just or unjust; or to beings capable of action with reference to their action in given cases. Distributive justice in exercise is the meting out of rewards and punishments according to conduct, upon the principle of natural fitness.

Love calls for the infliction of punishment upon the sinner, as already seen. It is the natural fitness of sin and pain to each other which constitute the ground of the infliction of the pain. But the repentant sinner is forgiven. What is still the relation of justice to the sinner? Evidently, the infliction of pain is as fit, as appropriate, to the sin as before. But it is not inflicted: that is, the sinner is treated better than he deserves. This is the grace of God. It is exactly opposed to justice, which in the sense of natural fitness, is never satisfied in the case of a forgiven sinner. In the larger

sense in which the word justice is sometimes, though improperly, used, as that which is on the whole right to be done, justice is abundantly satisfied. But with mere reference to natural fitness, pain is as appropriate an affliction upon the repentant sinner after repentance as before, since it respects what he has done, and not simply what he now is. Just as in the human state, it is often the best evidence of repentance that a man should be willing to suffer the just punishment for his crimes, so in the government of God, after repentance the guilt of the past remains, and punishment is still fit, so far as the sin alone is concerned.

Justice is sometimes represented as an attribute of God, which like all his attributes must be exercised, and it is said that the atonement is provided that this justice may be satisfied. Now, if it is fit that sin be followed by the infliction of pain upon the sinner, then justice, which is founded in this fitness, is not satisfied when pain is not inflicted upon the sinner, or when he is forgiven. It is just as much the demand of justice that the sinner should himself suffer the pain, as that the pain should follow the sin at all. Hence, although an atonement has been made, the exact demands of justice are not satisfied in case of the repentant. True, that which is fit upon the whole is done; but this is the demand of benevolence rather than of justice. In one sense the justice of God is satisfied by the atonement, in that his perfect character is exhibited and it is seen that he is just, that is righteous, *δικαιος* (Rom. iii. 26), though he forgives.

2. The doctrine of justification by faith.

It has been said above that when the sinner repents, he puts forth that choice of benevolence which is the essence of holiness, and so God must approve him. The relations of this thought may need explanation, that it may be seen that it does not endanger the doctrine of justification by faith.

If any one ever remained without sin, that is, if any one

ever perfectly exemplified in all his acts from the beginning of life perfect benevolence, he would need no salvation, for he would be in a holy state, and would receive eternal life as his fit reward. But men are sinners from the beginning of moral action. When a man repents, there are two things to be considered. First, there is his past, which is a record of transgressions; and there is his present, which is a state of holiness. The holy choice which he has put forth is as holy, now that he returns from sin, as it would have been had he never put forth any other; and so far, he is perfectly holy. But his past record must be provided for, and he cannot be forgiven without the blotting out of that. His present holy choice is a work, in a certain sense. It is that which God has condescended to accept for perfect works of obedience when he gives him the righteousness "of faith" [that is *ἐκ πίστεως*, made out of faith, as the other righteousness is *ἐξ ἔργων*, made out of works]. But it does not merit the forgiveness of the past, for it cannot be reckoned to the credit of the past, it fills out only the present, and is all demanded at the present by the call of duty, whatever the past may have been. Neither will it prove sufficient for salvation in the future, for it will suffer many interruptions, and future sins will, if strict justice is done, call for punishment. Faith remains, therefore, the condition of the exercise of the free grace of God, in that grace alone can forgive the past and the future as well; and therefore the man is justified freely by grace. His holy choice, though it deserves the approval of God, considered simply in itself, does not deserve the forgiveness of all his sins.

3. The doctrine of imputation.

Since the demands of supposed debts to God, or of a supposed attribute of justice are not satisfied by the atonement, as thus conceived, but it is only made consistent with the interests of the whole creation for God to forgive, there is no need for viewing the merits of Christ as transferred in any sense to the believer. Thus exaggerated forms of the doctrine of imputation are avoided. But the essence of the doctrine, that it is wholly on account of the work of Christ that we are forgiven, remains. The work of Christ is reckoned or imputed to us in the sense that we are forgiven on its account, and could not otherwise be.

4. The extent of the atonement.

The obstacles which prevented forgiveness without any condition though the sinner might have repented, lay wholly within the realm of the divine. God's character, the system of influences he had established, etc., prevented it. There was nothing in the repentant sinner considered simply in himself, which opposed it; though his conscience also echoes the divine demand that nothing be done derogatory to holiness in forgiveness. Hence when these obstacles are removed in any single case, and the character of God is exhibited, and the authority of his law maintained in the case of a single forgiven sinner, it is equally consistent for him to forgive any number of sinners. The difficulty was never quantitative, but qualitative. Hence the atonement provides for the forgiveness of all men, if they will repent. Whether they will in actual fact repent, is a matter of free choice under election. Thus on the one hand, the atonement gives a basis for the free proclamation of salvation to all men; but on the other it does nothing towards securing salvation in the case of any individual man. It is no argument for universal salvation, but it is the basis of sincere offers of pardon to every man. Thus it is anew a display of the love of God. Love calls for the doing of all that can be

done for the holiness and happiness of guilty men; and since an atonement could be made which should avail for all the race as truly as for any one man, love called for such an atonement. Here it is provided.

And we may say, in accordance with the principles of love, that election consists in the determination by God to put forth such influences in the case of some particular men as shall certainly, though not necessarily, lead to their free choice of the service of God. Now love will also demand that God surround every man with all the influences towards holiness which he can consistently bring to bear in the system as it is arranged, and that he will, further, elect and actually persuade to the formation of the fundamental holy choice, as many as he can in consistency with the system which he has adopted. Thus the limitations of election will be, like the positive reach of election, determined by general love.

5. The capacity in which God acts in forgiving sin.

The theories of the atonement from Anselm to Grotius had viewed God as the offended party. Grotius said that God acted in this matter as a ruler. The theory of benevolence compels the thinker to leave the ground of the older theories at once. As soon as there are creatures in the universe, God must act with reference to their good, or upon the principles of a general love. He cannot therefore ask simply what the demands of his own nature in itself are. He cannot determine to satisfy his justice, for example, as such, without regard to any other consideration. Thus, in acting from benevolence, he acts as a member of an organism, as a public person, and when he is considered, as Grotius considered him only, as the head of a divine government, he acts as a ruler. To act as the offended party, is to act with sole reference to himself; and so to act is in direct antagonism to the idea that all virtue consists in benevolence. A God acting as the offended party in the matter of forgiveness would be an immoral God.

6. The advantages of this theory.

It meets the principal objections which have arisen against this doctrine better than any other theory. For example:—

(1) Unitarians object to the older theory on the ground that, upon a theory which makes Christ pay man's debt, or teaches that Christ's merits are imputed to the believer, salvation is due to man in justice; whereas it is the plain teaching of the Bible that salvation is by grace. It is no answer to this objection to say that grace provided the scheme of the atonement, even if salvation itself is not directly given by grace, for the Bible says again and again, Ye are saved by grace. The benevolence theory makes it perfectly plain that since the atonement only makes it *consistent* for God to pardon sinners, and since they are treated better than they deserve, their forgiveness is by grace, and might in strict justice, still be refused them.

(2) Universalists formerly taught that all men for whom atonement avails at all are already saved, since their debts are paid by it, and that, as it is meant for all men, all are saved. The only possible way of avoiding this conclusion upon the older theory is by limiting the atonement in its design and efficiency to the elect. But this is directly across the declarations of the gospel found on every page of the Bible. Christ died for all men. The benevolence theory accepts the Bible statement, and has no difficulty with the conclusion of the Universalists, since it does not teach that Christ paid our debt, or that we have a claim in justice to forgiveness.

But its great advantage is that it puts the atonement upon a truly ethical basis. It finds it upon an idea, and it derives its moving force from the very heart of God, from his love, which is his essence. The elder theory founded the atonement also upon an idea, upon God's justice; but the idea was hastily seized upon, and was not the fundamental principle of the divine nature. Thus it ran the risk, and

actually fell into the mistake here, as well as in its conception of election, of making God either non-moral or immoral. It has an idea, but it is not an ethical idea. God's justice, as it conceives this, is as much a physical attribute as his wisdom. But the benevolence theory is both ideal and ethical.

7. Its relations to the old theory.

(1) It agrees with the old theory in placing the obstacles to the forgiveness of man without an atonement in God, but differs from it in making that obstacle one lying in the character of God and in the system established by him, and not one arising from his nature, as distinct from his character.

(2) It agrees with the old theory in teaching that the sufferings of Christ are substituted for our punishment, but differs in making them an example instead of the exact punishment called for by distributive justice.

(3) Both theories acknowledge the fact that distributive justice calls for the punishment of the sinner himself: the old theory modifies the conception in its application to the atonement, so as to drop out the personal element from punishment in order to make the sufferings of Christ a satisfaction to justice, while the new theory retains the personal element and therefore denies that his sufferings form a satisfaction. Both theories teach that God is satisfied, though in different ways and respects.

(4) The theories agree as to the person of Christ, and the relation of his deity to his work.

(5) The theories agree as to the sufficiency of the atonement for all men when considered in itself. But the old theory, since it teaches the impotence of the will of man to choose life without the grace of God, puts the obstacle to repentance in God's not electing certain, while the new theory, which holds to the freedom of the will, teaches that the obstacle is to be found in the fixity of men's evil wills, which are able to turn but will not. The theories agree in

ascribing limitations to the election of God, which is necessary, on the old theory metaphysically, on the new practically, to the formation of the holy faith and repentance; but the one puts these in the inscrutable attributes of God, the other in his character and system.

(6) The new theory contains as an essential element the moral influence exerted by the atonement in moving man to repentance and faith; the other almost ignores this feature.

(7) The whole difference is resolved into the view of the character of God. The old theory makes the character of God inexplicable; the new makes it the same as that of holy men, being comprised in the attribute of love.

8. Its relations to the biblical expressions.

In some respects the accordance with the letter as well as the meaning of Scripture is very striking. The limits set to the discussion by the nature of such an article as this, will prevent elaborate marshalling of the passages. The more important ones must suffice. The theory agrees with the Scriptures remarkably:—

(1) In respect to the character of God. This is described in 1 John iv. 7, 8, 16, as love. This appears to be a comprehensive statement like that of the theory that all the moral attributes of God are comprised in love. God is nowhere called justice. He is often said to be just, and this sometimes in the sense of righteous. But he is never said to be justice.

(2) In respect to the nature of morality, right conduct, virtue, or holiness among men. Matt. xxiii. 37 takes up the words of the old law and says that man is to love God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself. This principle of love in its twofold application comprises all the duty of man, for "On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets." Paul also says in a similar connection, "He that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law"

(Rom. xii. 8). And the epistle of love, 1 John iii. 11-23; v. 2, presents the same thought in various forms.

(3) In respect to the sending of Christ. The New Testament is full of such passages as John iii. 16, "God so loved the world that he sent his only Son."

(4) In respect to the general character of the atonement. The disciples were to go into all the world and "make disciples of every nation." And their message was always to be: "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out;" "He that will, let him take;" "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." This, in differing phrase, is the refrain of all the New Testament.

(5) In respect to the use of the atonement as the great proof of the love of God. In 1 John iii. 16; iv. 9, 19, we have this most concisely stated: "Hereby know we love because he laid down his life for us;" "Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son;" "We love because he first loved us." But the constant use of the atonement, the appeal to the death of Christ throughout the New Testament needs no amplification here.

(6) In respect to justice there may be less agreement among Bible students. Most of the passages like those of Isa. liii. are equally well interpreted, so far as the mere expressions used are concerned, under either theory. The plainest passage in the Bible in reference to justice and its relations to atonement is that in Rom. iii. 25 and 26, which might almost be taken as a dogmatic definition of the benevolence theory. It reads: "Whom [Christ] God set forth to

time, in the forbearance of God; for the shewing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season; that he might himself be [appear] just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus." The object of the propitiation is to exhibit God's character, and to effect certain results through this exhibition. It is therefore not to satisfy an attribute simply as such.