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## ARTICLE V.

## GOVERNMENT AND ATONEMENT.

BY THE REV. ARCHIBALD EUGENE THOMSON.

THAT God's direction of the universe is the direction of a ruler admits of no question with those who have read nature or the Bible with any care. In the natural world we are encompassed on every side by laws which are rigidly enforced, and which we break at our peril. Through the entire Old Testament God assumes the title and authority of a judge and a ruler, and he is so addressed and spoken of by men. Abraham said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"<sup>1</sup> In the wilderness, God, as a ruler, gave to Israel a code of laws. David said, "Yea, the Lord sitteth as king forever."<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah said, "But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king."<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, the "kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven" were strikingly prominent in the preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus, and appear frequently in the writings of the apostles. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come"; Paul, in an inspired and inspiring apostrophe, said, "Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever,"<sup>4</sup> and John saw God, as a ruler, administering justice to the world. The kingdom of God was largely the theme of Christ's conversation with his disciples during the momentous interval between his resurrection and ascension.<sup>5</sup> Whatever God's relation to those who since their creation have heartily obeyed his

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 25. <sup>2</sup> Ps. xxix. 10. <sup>3</sup> Jer. x. 10. <sup>4</sup> 1 Tim. i. 17. <sup>5</sup> Acts i. 3.

will may be, his relation to those who are disposed to disobedience must always be the relation of a governor to subjects.

There are certain characteristics which, of moral necessity, belong to a good government; and, as God's rule will certainly be perfectly righteous and wise, we are justified in affirming with certainty these qualities concerning his government. They are demanded by reason; they are the simplest applications of the moral law; and they are necessary to intelligent thought concerning God's government. Like time relations of God, it may be affirmed that he is free from them, but, constituted as we are, we cannot think of God without them. Further, these features are not only demanded by reason, but are shown by Scripture actually to belong to the divine government. It will be profitable briefly to review them.

1. *The Purpose of a Government.*—The purpose of a good government is to keep the governed in proper bounds, giving to each the best opportunity that can be had in harmony with the welfare of all. Thus a good government exists in the interest of the governed. It should be remembered that God's own conduct is under the general law of the government of which he is the head, and he is not at liberty to unduly sacrifice himself for the sake of his subjects, any more than to sacrifice his subjects for the sake of himself.

2. *The Purpose of Laws.*—Laws are the government's expression of the proper bounds of conduct mentioned above. They show the government's view of what is for the highest welfare of all, and therefore of what ought and ought not be done by all. Under a good government, therefore, laws are always intended for the highest welfare of the governed. Under a government of perfect character and perfect wisdom, the laws will be perfect to the smallest detail, and cannot be changed in the least partic-

ular without limiting the opportunities of, or giving undue license to, and thus harming, the governed. Such a government is God's. "As for God, his way is perfect."<sup>1</sup>

3. *The Purpose of Penalties.*—Penalties are intended to secure obedience to the laws on the part of those who are disposed to violate them. If all subjects were perfectly righteous, laws would still be needed, since the subjects, being of limited knowledge, would be in danger of doing innocently what would be harmful to themselves or to others. The laws would, however, come to them not so much as authoritative statutes as greatly desired counsel from one capable of giving it in perfection. There is no need of penalties when the subjects are constantly in the attitude of him who said, "O how love I thy law!"<sup>2</sup> If, however, any are disposed to law-breaking, the highest welfare of the governed can be secured only by the enforcement of the laws, and such enforcement can be secured only by means of penalties. A wilful law-breaker is one to whom the rewards of law-keeping do not appeal sufficiently to insure his obedience. Such must be dealt with from the side of penalty. The painful consequences of wrongdoing must be made such as, if possible, to prevent the offender from repeating his offense, and to prevent others from entering upon his course of evil.

There are, therefore, two purposes in the general infliction of penalties, though not in every case; viz., the reformation of the offender, and the impressing others with a sense of the harmfulness and unprofitableness of the offense. When a trifling fine is imposed in the police court, the purpose is to make an impression on the offender. Very likely society will not be impressed at all. When a man is sent to the penitentiary for twenty years, the reform of the offender is desired, but the chief end in view is the prevention of similar offenses on the part of others.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xviii. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxix. 97.

When capital punishment is inflicted, the only purpose is to make the greatest possible impression on society. As President Fairchild used to say, "We do not hang a man to reform him." The government decides what crime shall have capital punishment for its penalty, and the Word of God tells us that under the divine government all mankind stood liable to that doom. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"<sup>1</sup>; "The wages of sin is death"<sup>2</sup>; "All have sinned."<sup>3</sup> Now assume a perfect government; one which exists to produce perfect character. Any wilful violation of law under that government is properly a capital crime. It defeats the very end for which the government exists, and is therefore treason. Such a government is God's. The penalty shows in some measure God's estimate of the harm done by any wilful violation of his laws. A traitor has no place within the borders of the nation to which he has proved himself unfaithful. A sinner has no place, at large, in God's universe.

4. *Enforcement of Law.*—Since good laws are enacted in the interest of the governed, a good government will strictly enforce them. It is no favor either to society or the criminal to permit a lax enforcement. It is the worst of injustice to the law-abiding citizen, and encourages the offender in his course of crime. Such failure to enforce righteous statutes brings the government into contempt, leads men to take the administration of justice into their own hands, and causes lynch law. Even though the offender be truly penitent, he cannot be safely pardoned on that ground alone. Others, wishing to do some unlawful act, will say, "I will take my neighbor's property or life, and, if I am detected and convicted, I will repent." The way would be open to the safe committal of any crime. Anarchy would be a speedy result. Society must be taken into the account. This is where the moral influence theory

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. xviii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vi. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 23.

of the atonement goes halting. For the at-one-ment of the sinner with God, two acts on God's part are necessary. (1) Since the sinner is certain not to repent of himself, God must do something to induce him, if possible, to return to his allegiance. This he does by his constant goodness; "not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance."<sup>1</sup> This, in supreme measure, Christ has done; "and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."<sup>2</sup> (2) Something must be done to make it safe, in view of the interests of the universe, for the penitent sinner to be pardoned. This also Christ did; "whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."<sup>3</sup> To say that God can safely pardon the penitent sinner, without something being done to make upon society as great an impression as would be made by the punishment of the sinner, is, at the last analysis, to deny the freedom of the human will, because God's *power* must be relied on to prevent others from taking advantage of his leniency.

Therefore, God's goodness insures the execution of his laws. It is only a weak or corrupt government that gives lax enforcement. All believe this. The conscience of the nation was with Mr. Roosevelt, when he enforced law in New York City. A perfect government will give perfect enforcement, because only those laws will have been enacted which are absolutely necessary for the welfare of the governed. Not a word of those laws could wisely be changed; no violation of them can safely be permitted. Men plead God's goodness as their reason for expecting to escape the penalty of their law-breaking, forgetting that God's goodness is our one ground of expectation that he will enforce every law that he has made. He could not be

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John xii. 32. A true view of the governmental necessity of the atonement includes all that there is in the "moral influence" theory.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 25.

holy else. Righteousness does not depend, in principle, on God. If there were no God, duty would exist wherever there were beings possessed of a moral nature. God is therefore under moral obligation as well as we. He is as much under obligation to make holy and perfect laws, such as he sees to be needed, and to enforce them perfectly, as we are to obey them perfectly. Hence, all proof that God is good is proof that his laws will be enforced, and that the law-breaker must suffer the penalty of his crime, unless some way can be found by which his pardon will not involve the defeat of the end for which God's holy and perfect law was enacted. If the sinner is to go free, two conditions must be fulfilled. (1) The sinner must abandon his sin. That goes without saying. No perfect government will pardon a law-breaker till he repents. (2) Some one must pay the penalty; not because God's law is a fetish, but because it is a holy necessity. Only by insisting on this necessity can God keep his government intact.

No aspect of God is more neglected to-day, and therefore more needed, than that which presents him as a governor, and puts mortals in their proper place as subjects, bound by every obligation to obey. Men need to remember that God's treatment of each sinner must be modified by the needs of the entire moral universe. A sinner wants to have God treat him as though he were the only finite being. God cannot do that. Angels, devils, and men are watching the enforcement of law. A great many faulty conclusions are reached by a kind of instinctive analogy. The sentimentalism with which a criminal is often treated by earthly governments, regardless of the effect on society, is carried over to the government of God. In these days, when sociology is so much talked about, and the solidarity of the human race is so often mentioned, it would be well if the solidarity of God's government and the created universe were more frequently considered.

How can this important part of the atoning work be wrought? Capital punishment is our due. Only life can buy life. Money cannot do it. One innocent man might die for a guilty one, and thus safely let him, if penitent, go free. But one common life cannot pay the penalty and atone for two. The death of the one would not make an impression on society equal to that which the infliction of the death penalty on the two was intended to make. The governor of a state might, we will assume, die for ten. His prominent position makes his life more valuable. The President of the United States might die for a hundred. But who shall die for billions? And who shall make such an atonement that they may be saved from eternal death? Manifestly there is but one of sufficient prominence. He is the Son of God. He did not merely suffer physical death. It was said of him, "that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man."<sup>1</sup> He did more than "taste" bodily death; he drained that cup to the dregs. On the cross, when the Father's face withdrew from him, he tasted the bitterness of eternal death.<sup>2</sup> Thus Christ was "once offered to bear the sin of many,"<sup>3</sup> and so doing he made it possible for God to forgive the penitent sinner without doing injustice to the rest of the universe by permitting his holy law to be brought into contempt. God can now "be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus."<sup>4</sup> Had not Christ thus been "made to be sin on our behalf," God could have justified the penitent sinner, that is, treated him as though he were innocent, but God could not at the same time have been just in his relation

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 9.

<sup>2</sup> In his prayer at the last supper Jesus said, "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Then not to know God is eternal death. This bitterness Christ tasted.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. ix. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. iii. 26.

to the rest of the universe, for whose sake, as well as this particular sinner's, the law had been enacted.

Further, the Bible must be our authority in this matter. No argument, however plausible, can be allowed any weight if it can be shown to traverse the Word of God; and what we find written in that Word is to be accepted as fact, though we may not be able as yet to see the full reason for it. It is interesting, however, to note that this view of God's government and the necessity of a sacrificial work of atonement is not only in accord with the biblical teachings, but exactly meets the moral condition of things in the world to-day.

It is a fact, often mentioned by those engaged in direct soul-winning, that it seems much more difficult to produce deep conviction of sin in the hearts of men than formerly. This is not unnatural; "where there is no law, neither is there transgression."<sup>1</sup> Anything that tends to contempt for the law of God reduces conviction of the sin of breaking the law, and nothing could possibly lead more directly to such contempt than remittance of penalty without something done to accomplish the purpose for which the penalty was decreed. This is a logical, necessary, and actual result of preaching the moral influence of Christ's death without its sacrificial character. In Jewish times the sacrificial victim died instead of the offender. To have let the offender go free without the sacrifice would have been to surely destroy regard for the law.<sup>2</sup> With this the conscience, when truly awakened, agrees. A man who has come to see his sins in their awfulness, and has caught

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 15.

<sup>2</sup> It should be remembered, that under the Mosaic law atonement looked primarily not to the moral influence exerted on the offender, but to his sin which brought him under the judgment of God. To atone was (כָּפַר) to cover the sin. Atonement was (כִּפּוּרִים or כִּפּוּר) a covering for the sin, an expiation without which, however penitent, the offender could not be at one with God.

a glimpse of the holiness of God, sees clearly that some one must pay the penalty, and he finds rest from the terrors of the law, not merely in seeing that Christ died to win him from the commission of sin, but "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,"<sup>1</sup> and since Christ has borne the penalty, the repentant sinner need not bear it.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible does not represent the atonement as an appeasing of the wrath of God; neither is God "so bound by his own laws that Christ must cut the bonds." The same law of loving wisdom which required him to make regulations for the moral conduct of the universe, requires him to enforce those regulations. A distinguished preacher has recently said, "Sacrifice is not a condition of God's forgiveness; it is the method by which he forgives; it is the method by which he pours his life into men that they may live." If sacrifice is not a condition of God's forgiveness, his government bears no analogy to earthly government, and we do not know how to think concerning it. The biblical teaching is, that sacrifice is the method by which God makes the pardon of the penitent rebel to be safe, as well as the method by which he inclines the rebel to repent. "The chastisement of his peace was upon us, and by his stripes we are healed."<sup>3</sup>

The moral influence theory of the atonement is thus closely connected with a light estimate of sin. Only the depraved see their hopeless condition. Others, who have not become outwardly so corrupt, rest on their morality, and think their sin trivial, since all that is necessary for salvation is to leave that sin. No propitiation is needed.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. liii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Most interesting and instructive is the account, by Rev. Thomas Laws, of the way in which Dr. C. A. Berry was led to preach the old-fashioned view of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ. He found that nothing else would bring peace to a penitent dying woman who had led a life of shame.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. liii. 5.

Paul, on the other hand, taught at Ephesus that salvation requires two actions on the part of man, viz., "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Further, the teaching that Christ's atoning work has its full effect in the moral influence thereby exerted on the sinner leads to a denial of the plainly biblical statements concerning reprobation, that God will not continue long to wait on the stubborn sinner. Therefore sinners, who have no notion of missing heaven, take liberties with divine mercy, under the fatal delusion that at any time they can come back to God. Since there is no question of the integrity of a government, God, to whom eternities are cheap, can and will wait endless ages for the sinner, always urging his love till the sinner repents. Nothing could be more opposite to the biblical teaching, and nothing be more logically the result of ignoring the governmental necessity of atonement. While the Universalist denomination is not making rapid progress, the Universalist belief is tainting a fearfully large number of the members of supposedly orthodox churches, and as a result is destroying their spiritual life and their concern for their fellow-men. The empty treasuries of our missionary societies bear eloquent testimony to the fact that the foundations are being destroyed. To this spread of universalistic notions, that view of the atonement which limits it to the moral influence of Christ's work upon the sinner directly contributes.

Another result is seen to-day in the prevalent weakening of the grasp of duty on the soul. The impenitent do not see themselves as rebels against God, under his just wrath because of their law-breaking, and bound by every obligation to repent at once. Instead, they are too often taught to regard themselves as in such a manner objects of his intense desire, that he will mightily move them to that

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 21.

which is their immediate and imperative duty. They expect religion to be made so pleasing that its attractiveness will overmaster the attractiveness of sin, and make it easy for them to return to God. They are waiting for some mighty moral influence to be exerted upon them, instead of recognizing that, in justice to the ends for which his government exists, God must require them to repent of their sin at duty's call, whatever the cost to them. It is one of the devil's circles.

In the early part of this century men were intrenched behind God's sovereignty, and the notion that they could not repent until mightily moved. To-day, one of the most common difficulties met is the idea that men need not repent till thus mightily moved. The end is the same. A similar result is seen in the churches. Duty has small power; the Sabbath service and the prayer-meeting must be made attractive, or covenant vows will be broken; people will give only when moved by some strong impulse, and will work, or refrain from working, as it pleases them. In secular matters we are becoming a law-breaking nation. People make the obligation to obey the laws of state or nation to depend on public sentiment. However righteous the law may be, if a considerable portion of the community wish to break it, they count themselves as really outside its authority. This is perhaps best seen in the case of laws prohibiting the liquor traffic.

One of the great secular journals of Chicago, which advocated opening the Columbian Exposition on Sunday, despite the condition on which Congress made its grant of money, has been calling attention to the present-day need of the character possessed by the Puritans. The same disposition to disregard law is found within the church. Men seem to think that if a sufficient number of law-breakers can be found, God must set aside his statutes. If the church generally unites in ignoring the new birth, God

must count the demand for it annulled. Many within the church are longing for a return of Puritanic character, without seeing that one of the leading qualities of the Puritan was a deep reverence for the government and law of God. His character was built on a belief in an atoning work of Christ, which was necessary because without it that government and that law would fail of the purpose for which they were ordained. Next to its lack of biblical warrant, and the fact that it is an instance of the common method of putting man's opinion into the Bible instead of bringing out of the Bible the will of God, perhaps the strongest indictment of that view of the atonement which omits its governmental necessity is the fact that those who are guilty of that omission are looking back wistfully to the character which was built, not on sentimentalism, but on a recognition of the essential facts of the divine government.

With all its advantages, a republican form of government lends itself easily to law-breaking. "We, the people," regard lightly the statutes which we, through our representatives, have enacted. God's government is not a republic, but an absolute monarchy, and there is no greater need on earth to-day than that view of the sacredness of divine law which is gained in the light of the cross, by which Christ not only holds out infinite inducement to the sinner to repent, but by which alone he made it possible for God safely to pardon the sinner who should return.