

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTIONS IN RELATION TO OUR LORD'S ATONEMENT.

BY THE REV. A. C. DOWNER, M.A., D.D., Ox., Public Preacher
in the Diocese of Southwark ; formerly Rector of Selham.

PRELIMINARY.

IN the remarks I am offering on this subject, I shall avoid certain recent tendencies.

First, the tendency to emphasize the Incarnation of Our Lord at the expense of His Atonement, or to speak of what is called "the extension of the Incarnation" at a moment such as that of the celebration of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, when the predominant thought is not that of Incarnation, but of Atonement.

Next, the tendency to define Atonement as the production of a mental state in which penitence renders a person capable of forgiveness, rather than as the freedom from the guilt, the conscience and the power of sin, secured for mankind by the Death of Christ and to be appropriated by faith. This, of course, is not to say that such a state of penitence is in any way excluded or to be regarded as unnecessary, but only that :

" Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone ;
Thou must save, and Thou alone."

Nor does this truth, when rightly applied, dissociate Our Lord's Death from His Incarnation, His Life in all its blessed steps, and His Resurrection from the dead. It is all part of one great whole. Although it is the Death which atones for sin, it could not do this without the life which went before the Cross, or the Resurrection, which followed it.

For my own part, I find it difficult to understand in what way the Death of Jesus Christ, under the circumstances in which it occurred, could be said to benefit mankind, nor how it could possibly produce a moral and spiritual change in the sinner, unless it was that of the willing Victim, giving Himself as a sacrifice for sin. Regarded as such a sacrifice, it has produced, and is daily producing, miracles of grace in the souls of men ; and indeed there is nothing else that can produce them.

And I hope I shall adhere to the principle upon which are based Our Lord's own Teaching, the whole of Primitive Christianity, and the entire Reformation of Religion to which we owe our liberties—namely, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Covenants are the

one and only court of final appeal in all doctrines of Faith and all rules of Duty.

THE ATONEMENT.

The Rending of the Temple Veil.

In connection, then, with the Atonement, we recall that at the moment when Our Lord expired, the Synoptic Evangelists state that the Veil of the Temple, or Sanctuary, was rent in twain; and the two former add "from the top to the bottom." We recognize in this the hand of God, who, by this striking phenomenon, signified the glorious fact that there no longer remained any barrier between God and man; that, beginning from heaven and reaching to earth, Jehovah Himself had abolished the partition separating His alienated creatures from Himself, and that now nothing was left to prevent any Jew, or indeed any human being whatsoever, from approaching Him in the inmost sanctuary with boldness, on the ground and by the faith of the Death which occurred at the same moment with the sign, and which had at last brought to complete perfection the long-awaited work of atonement.

For here we recognize, in all its full-orbed glory, the revelation of the love of the Father toward His sinful children, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 10). This is the basis of the Divine assurance through St. John that "if any man sin"—not the present tense *ἀμαρτάνη*, which would imply *living* in sin, but the aorist *ἀμαρτή*, which conveys the idea of *an act* of sin—"if any man *commit a sin*, we have a Paraclete with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation (*ἱλασμός*) for our sins" (1 John ii. 1, 2).

This, surely, is the typical import of the Mercy-seat of Exod. xxv. 17: "And thou shalt make a mercy-seat of pure gold . . . and thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark . . . and *there* I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat." It is the same word that is used in Rom. iii. 25, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, or *ἱλαστήριον*, through faith in his blood"; where the vital connection between the bloody death of Our Lord and the propitiation for sin is unmistakably displayed. The word *ἱλασμός* leads up directly to the unspeakably precious conception contained in the word *καταλλαγή*, translated in the A.V. of Rom. v. 11, "atonement." "Our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation." The same word, or the closely connected verb *καταλλάσσειν*, is employed by St. Paul to convey the reconciling of the world to God through the rejection of the Jewish nation. He also uses it (1 Cor. vii. 11) to imply the return to her husband of the wife who had departed from him. Both these instances are significant as bearing upon the Atonement of Christ. St. Paul carries the conception to the zenith of its splendour when he says, "God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. v. 18), and in Rom. v. 10, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God

by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

"The word of reconciliation" and "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. v. 18, 19), by which it is made known, are embraced and expressed in the words *καταλλάσσειν* and *καταλλαγῆ*, that fall like Divine music on the ear of a convicted sinner in conscious need of pardon and acceptance with his Father in heaven.

The extremely able theologian Nathaniel Dimock, in his invaluable work, *The Doctrine of the Death of Christ*, says :

"It suffices for our purpose to say that the light which thus shines on the idea of propitiation constrains us to connect it only and entirely with the death of Christ. It cannot be transferred from that to any past or present offering or presentation by the ascended Saviour in heaven of the Blood which had been shed on Calvary. It cannot be shifted to any consecration to God of life raised from the dead. Viewed fairly in connection with the whole argument of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans, there ought to be no room for question that it is simply and only the death of Christ, which, being accepted in heaven, causes that God can be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. And therefore it is simply and only the death of Christ which is the propitiation—the atoning sacrifice for sin."¹

And again :

"For the one true sacrifice of propitiation, we shall be constrained to see peace made by the blood of the Cross, atonement effected only by the death of the Cross, expiation made only by the shedding of the life blood of the Son of God, giving Himself for us."²

Consonant with this is Our Lord's own use, as applied to Himself, of the term *λύτρον*, ransom. "The Son of Man came to give His life a *λύτρον* for many" (St. Matt. xx. 28 ; St. Mark x. 45). This is His own view of His death, or, let us rather say, the revelation from His own lips of its true import. For in the word *λύτρον* are combined the ideas of both expiation and redemption. It expresses *the very price* which Our Lord was about to give for man's salvation—namely, *His life*. Could words be found to express with greater plainness vicarious action ?

The verb *λυτροῦν*, in the middle voice *λυτροῦσθαι*, is employed by Cleopas and his companion, on the walk to Emmaus (St. Luke xxiv. 21), to denote the action of Him who, according to Old Covenant prophecy, should have redeemed Israel. It is used also by St. Paul (Titus ii. 14), where he says of Our Lord, "Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity." And in St. Peter's first Epistle (i. 18), he says that those to whom he was writing had been redeemed (*ἐλυτρώθητε*) from a vain course of life by the precious blood of Christ, as by the blood of the Passover Lamb. The Writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, speaking of Christ as the High Priest of His people, expresses by the term *λύτρωσις*, which of course is a derivative of *λύτρον*, the result of Our Lord's sacrificial work, in terms drawn from the account in Leviticus xvi. of the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement. He says : "He (Christ) entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal

¹ Chap. iii. p. 41.

² Chap. iii. p. 46.

redemption for us." Sir Wm. Ramsay translates "entered and obtained" (Heb. ix. 12).

The compound *ἀπολύτρωσις*, employed repeatedly by St. Paul, is used by him in the two identical passages (Eph. i. 7; Col. i. 14): "In whom"—that is, in Christ—"we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." It will be noted that in this twice-repeated verse, forgiveness is in apposition with redemption, which renders it impossible to evade the inference that forgiveness is in effect the same thing as redemption. Here, then, we have Our Lord, Cleopas quoted by St. Luke, St. Paul repeatedly, St. Peter, and the Writer to the Hebrews, all using either *λύτρωον*, or a derivative of *λύτρωον*, to describe the effect of the work done by Our Lord for sinners on the Cross.

The subject of Repentance is by many very imperfectly understood. Sometimes it is confounded with penitence, or sorrow for sin. This is refuted by St. Paul's clear distinction between them in 2 Cor. vii. 10, where he says that "godly sorrow," *ἡ κατὰ Θεὸν λύπη*, "works repentance unto salvation," *μετάνοια εἰς σωτηρίαν*; and, as that which causes a phenomenon cannot be identified with the phenomenon itself, we are forced to the conclusion that sorrow, *λυπή*, must be distinguished from repentance, *μετάνοια*, however closely they are connected as cause and effect.

The original meaning, then, of Repentance is a change of mind. Our Lord used it in that sense when, speaking of the son who at first refused to comply with his father's request that he should do a day's work in the family vineyard, He added, "Afterward he repented and went." The Writer to the Hebrews does the like, when, quoting Psalm cx. 4, he says, "The LORD sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

The next stage in the meaning of the word is in its application to sin. No better definition of Repentance in this sense, nor half so good, can possibly be found than that in our incomparable Catechism, where one of the prerequisites for Baptism is said to be "Repentance, whereby we forsake sin." But the most intimate and essential idea connoted by Repentance is the all-important change of mind as to the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the close of St. Peter's address on the Day of Pentecost (Acts ii.), when the convicted sinners inquired, "Brethren, what shall we do?" "Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Why did not St. Peter say, "Believe," as well as "Repent"? Undoubtedly, because *they believed already*. What was wanted was that they should change their minds about their attitude to the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth and to His bodily resurrection from the dead. That was what St. Peter meant by "Repent"; and to place it beyond doubt in the eyes of all men, they were to receive baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, so definitely and finally separating themselves from the foes who had clamoured for His crucifixion and signifying their confidence that in Jesus the crucified one, rejected of man, they were receiving remission of sins and acceptance with God.

The Witness of the Two Sacraments.

We should not overlook the fact that what the two holy Sacraments present to faith is not the Incarnation of Our Lord, but His Death. As to Baptism, St. Paul says (Rom. v. 3) that men are baptized into His *death*. And those, he says, who come to eat and drink the sacred bread and cup in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper "do show *the Lord's Death* till He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26). The only memorial of Himself which Jesus Christ has left upon earth is the memorial of His death.

Fallacious Methods in Dr Rashdall's Bampton Lectures.

It is at this point that we are compelled to part company with the argument of the Bampton Lectures of 1915, on "The Idea of Atonement."

The learned lecturer, in his zeal against the truth that Our Lord died as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of man, shows, I think, indifferent reasoning power. In the first place, when he encounters in the Scriptures words which make against his theory, he says that they are probably additions to the text by some later hand; which is a very easy method of getting rid of them, though hardly a satisfactory one. And when he argues from the fact that Our Lord taught that forgiveness of sins is granted to the sinner on his repentance, to the further conclusion that *therefore* we may safely infer that no atonement for sin is required, and hence that Our Lord's death had no relation to man's sin, his logic seems to trip. The obvious reply to this line of argument is that it is a "non sequitur." The conclusion does not follow from the premisses. In other words, it is a logical fallacy.

Conception of the Atonement.

It is surely important to form a true conception of the Atonement of Christ. It is not, as once held, a payment made by Our Lord to the Devil, nor merely and only a substitution of one Person for others, to receive punishment for sin. To my mind, it deals with the whole question of Evil. We do not know how, when, or why, Evil originated, but we do know that it is essentially and unalterably opposed to God and consequently that God is essentially opposed to it. The question then arises, Is this state of things to go on for ever? Are we to regard it as a permanent dualism? Surely not. We who believe in the ultimate triumph of good cannot think this. We must believe that good—and God—will at some time prevail against evil. The case of man is that, being a sinner, he has, to a fatal, though not an irretrievable, extent, identified, or at least connected, himself with evil. In this catastrophic opposition between God and evil, in which man is involved, how is it possible to deal with the situation? Plainly, it can only be by God taking the whole burden upon Himself. He Himself must bear the whole cost of annihilating evil and, as a part of this process, must pay the entire price of recovering man from its power. It was for this cause that God became Man, that in a Personality combining the natures of both God and Man He might endure the whole stress

and burden of evil ; and, as this is death, it was necessary for Him in this Personality to die. The Godhead, of course, cannot die, but it could and did impart an infinite sufficiency to the death of the Manhood, by which the object was accomplished and sinful man redeemed.

The effects of the Atonement are not confined to the cancelling of guilt. A verse in Psalm cxvi., to my thinking, analyses and embodies the whole of present salvation. The Psalmist says, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling." That is to say, salvation, which is not a future thing, but a present one, consists of three elements : (1) First, Deliverance from death, which is the effect of guilt ; or, in one word, Pardon : (2) second, Deliverance from Tears, which are the effect of a conscience burdened with sin ; or, in one word, Peace : and (3) third, Deliverance from falling, which is the effect of the working of sin in the daily life ; or, in one word, Holiness. The work of the Atonement, then, is to produce Pardon, Peace, and Holiness ; and these three, which together constitute present salvation, are all derived from the Cross of Christ. They cannot possibly be had elsewhere. Each and all of them must be received by simple faith, or trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ. All of them originate in the free love of God and issue in the Justification, Sanctification, and ultimate Glorification of Man. Does not this conception of Atonement remove the difficulties of those who demur to its being confined to the idea of vicarious suffering, which apparently they denominate "the objective theory" ? I venture to think that the true description of what I have endeavoured to set out would be "The Larger View of the Atonement," and I put it forward in the sincere hope that it will satisfy the minds of those brethren who have felt dissatisfied with the so-called "objective" theory, and so form a basis upon which we may agree.

There is another unfortunate misconception by the writer I have referred to, which I will endeavour to remove. He speaks of what he calls (p. 164) "the terrible doctrine of the Epistle to the Hebrews," which he imagines to be that, under the Gospel, only one repentance is possible and that post-baptismal sin cannot be repented of or forgiven. He quotes Hebrews x. 26, 27. "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgement and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries." These burning words form one of five passages in this Epistle conveying earnest warning to the wavering Hebrew believers against leaving their faith in Jesus as the Messiah and reverting to Judaism. They succeed an exhortation not to forsake the gatherings for worship which were also a part of their testimony to their unbelieving Jewish brethren and the Gentile world around. To absent themselves from these meetings, as some of them appear to have done, would be a step toward apostasy. To "sin wilfully" (verse 26) does not here imply any and every kind of sin, but, as throughout this epistle, the special sin of cravenly deserting

Jesus Christ and so justifying His enemies. In that case, "there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins." There is indeed such a sacrifice, but only one. It is the sacrifice of Calvary, which avails for those who accept it. But, in the case contemplated, this sacrifice which had formerly been acknowledged, is finally rejected; *and there is no other.* "There is no longer left a sacrifice for sins." The sinner is therefore left shelterless. It is not affirmed that the sacrifice of Christ cannot atone for the sin of backsliding, but that no other sacrifice can do so; so that there is nothing to stand between the sinner and judgment if Our Lord's sacrifice be refused. The bearing of this upon the tempted and vacillating Hebrews is obvious.

So, then, let us repeat, this passage does not teach, nor does any other passage in this epistle teach, that there can be no second repentance. It affirms the far more important matter that, while Christ's sacrifice avails for any sin and all sin, there is no other sacrifice that does so.

It has been stated in the public Press that there are those, even among professed teachers of religion, who not only deny the birth of Our Lord from a virgin mother, but also reject His Resurrection, in which they have affirmed their belief in the very definite and unmistakable terms of the IVth Article of our religion, in which it is stated that "Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again His body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature"; and who also deny His Second Advent, as also unequivocally affirmed in the same Article.

We ask by what jugglery with words can such persons repeat the Apostles' Creed, or sing the verses of the Te Deum, or repeat the solemn affirmation of the Prayer of Consecration in our Communion Service, that on the Cross Our Lord made "a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world"; by what treatment of the conscience they can bring themselves to imagine that they can reconcile, not contraries, but contradictories. Frank unbelief, supported by some attempt at rational argument, demands respect, when followed by consistent action. We meet with that at the Marble Arch and on Tower Hill. But to accept membership in the Church, to obtain, under the most binding pledges, its commission, to secure emoluments provided for the maintenance of the Catholic Faith, and to live in the unblushing enjoyment of these, while themselves denying that faith, argues a state of mind incomprehensible to the ordinary man. Let such lay down their offices and resign their emoluments. Then we shall listen to them with respect and confer with them, if they wish it, on equal terms.

What lies at the root of all expedients to get rid of the sacrificial, saving character of the atoning death of Our Lord, is the lack of any true conviction of sin. When that is produced in the soul by the action of the Paraclete, there will be no more carping or cavilling. Our Lord's atoning sacrifice will stand out as essential to the world's salvation. There will be no questioning as to whether

the Atonement is compatible with the glorious truth that God is Love, because the Atonement will be seen to be the highest manifestation of that love. Then those golden words will be seen inscribed upon the Cross, "Sic Deus dilexit mundum."

CONCLUSION.

Now that I am concluding these remarks, I will venture to cite utterances of three of God's saints, which may bring to a head what I have imperfectly endeavoured to set out.

The first is from Chrysostom.

"That death," he says, "saved the perishing world; that death united heaven with earth; that death destroyed the tyranny of the devil; it made men angels and sons of God; that death brought our nature unto the royal throne."

The second is a cablegram to a friend from the famous Cambridge cricketer, and still more famous missionary, C. T. Studd, in 1927, with reference to the state of affairs which then prevailed and still exists. He said:

"Here we dread neither death, hell, devils, nor men. We re-declare our Gospel—Jesus only, God, Saviour, King, Crucified, Risen, Glorious; here in spirit, returning soon bodily. All other gospels anathema. Trust God; pray; play the game. Laugh at impossibilities. Sweet and right it is to die for Jesus. This is our testimony to the world."

And finally, the supreme summons by the Writer to the Hebrews (x. 19, etc.):

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure Water."

THE SACRAMENT OF LIFE. J. H. Grummitt. *S.C.M. Press.*
2s. 6d.

Evidently the public-school boy of to-day is regarded as a more thoughtful and serious person than those who had to listen to sermons such (for instance) as Dr. Farrar's, with their anecdotes and stirring appeals.

These nine addresses seem like lay-sermons in school chapel, and demand some previous knowledge and ability to follow a reasoned train of thought if they are to be appreciated. Some of the titles are Values, Vocation, Humour, and Beauty; and the advice given is useful, but does not go very deep. The little volume may help some lads to realise what a Christian life is meant to be, and as such is recommended by the Bishop of Croydon in a Foreword.