

*THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT.*

X. THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT.

WE have now learnt, by examination of the documents contained in the New Testament, that its various writers agree to teach, and to represent Christ as teaching, that, even as compared with His spotless life and His words of wisdom and mercy, His death upon the cross is in a unique sense the channel through which comes from God to man the salvation announced by Christ; and as teaching that for this end He deliberately died, that this costly means was absolutely needful for our salvation, and that the need for it was in man's sin. We also found that St. Paul went beyond the other writers of the New Testament in asserting that the need for this costly means of salvation from sin has its root in the eternal justice of God.

We now ask, Who are embraced in the purpose of salvation which Christ died to accomplish? Did He in any real sense die for all men, or did He die only for a part of the race?

Wherever the writers of the New Testament describe, in general terms and without any other specific reference, the purpose of the Death of Christ, they represent that purpose as including the whole race, and in some passages (*e.g.* Colossians i. 20) as having a still wider scope. This element of the teaching of the New Testament about the Death of Christ demands now further attention.

In Romans v. 12-14 St. Paul asserts and then proves that through one man's sin "death passed through to all men." He then goes on to say that in this respect Adam is "a type of the Coming One," *i.e.* manifestly of Christ; and that through His obedience "the many will be constituted righteous." In verse 18 the Apostle says that this

influence tending to "justification of life" is designed *for all men*": εἰς πάντα ἀνθρώπους, εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς. The preposition εἰς denotes here, as almost always when not used in a local or temporal sense, a mental direction towards an object, *i.e.* an aim or purpose. In other words, St. Paul asserts that the influences which come to men through Christ were designed "for all men."

The parallel between Adam and Christ is much closer than at first sight appears. It is true that, whereas through Adam's sin all men everywhere actually die, St. Paul uses language, *e.g.* 2 Corinthians xi. 15, Philippians iii. 19, which proves that he had no hope that all men will ultimately be saved. But this does not destroy or weaken the comparison. For in each case the abiding effect of the influence depends on each one's own action. Through Adam all men inevitably go down into the grave: through Christ come influences which lay hold of every man and which will raise from the grave into endless life all who yield to them. In each case the influence is real and universal; and in each case the abiding result depends upon the man himself.

This remarkable parallel reveals the immense importance, in St. Paul's thought, of the death of Christ. For it implies that through His death is removed an effect as far-reaching as the race, and almost as old. And it implies that the purpose of the death of Christ embraces the whole race.

In Philippians ii. 10, 11 we read that God raised Christ in order that at His name every knee may bow and every tongue make confession. We cannot conceive this worship and praise to be other than genuine. Consequently, in this passage St. Paul represents the purpose of salvation for which God raised Christ from the grave to the throne as embracing all men. Similarly, in Colossians i. 20 we read that God was pleased "to reconcile all things to Himself

through Christ, having made peace through the blood of His cross, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heavens." And in Ephesians i. 9 we read that God's purpose "in reference to the administration of the fulness of the seasons" is to gather up under one Head all things in Christ. The neuter here includes, according to Greek usage, persons and things, these being looked at merely as objects of thought without reference to personality. These passages describe manifestly a purpose of salvation; and they assert clearly that this purpose embraces all men.

Still more conspicuous is the universal purpose of the death of Christ in the latest group of the epistles of St. Paul. In 1 Timothy ii. 1-5 he exhorts that prayer be made for "all men," including kings and those in authority, and gives as a reason that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." This he supports by appealing to the "One God and One Mediator of God and men who gave Himself a ransom for all." Similarly, in chapter iv. 10 Christ is described as "Saviour of all men, especially of believers." He is a Saviour specially of believers, because in them is actually accomplished His purpose of salvation: and, that He is called Saviour of all men, implies that His purpose of salvation embraces all men. In the same sense, in Titus ii. 11 the grace of God is said to be "saving towards all men": σωτήριος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις. These last words, which embrace conspicuously *all men*, are found also in Romans v. 12, 18, 1 Timothy ii. 1, 4, iv. 10. They are much more definite than their English equivalent.

This plain teaching is confirmed by the words of Christ recorded in the Fourth Gospel. In John iii. 16 we read that the love which prompted God's gift of His only begotten Son was love to "the world"; and that its aim was "that every one who believeth in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." Our Lord goes on to say in verse

17 that "God sent the Son into the world . . . in order that the world may be saved through Him." In chapter vi. 51 Christ declares that He will give His flesh "for the life of the world"; and in chapter xii. 47 that He came in order that He "might save the world." John the Baptist pointed to Christ, as recorded in John i. 29, as "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world." In 1 John ii. 2 we read that "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for all the world": and in chapter iv. 14 Christ is called the "Saviour of the world."

These passages, like those quoted above from the pen of St. Paul, assert clearly that God's purpose of salvation through the death of Christ embraced all men, and imply that they who perish do so, not because they were excluded by God from His purpose of salvation, but simply and only because they refused the offered salvation.

These plain statements receive important confirmation from a casual appeal of St Paul in Romans ii. 4, where he blames a supposed objector for not knowing that God is leading him to repentance. Yet, in spite of this Divine guidance, the man in question is said in the next verse to have an "impenitent heart." The Apostle evidently means, according to Greek use of the present and imperfect tenses, that God is exerting upon him a real influence tending to repentance; but that, in consequence of his resistance to it, this influence is without result. This appeal implies that upon all men God is exerting this influence. For, if there were an exception, it might be the man to whom St. Paul speaks. Moreover, if, as St. Paul taught, God gave Christ to die in order to harmonize with His own justice the justification of sinners, these Divine influences tending to salvation would have been, apart from the death of Christ, inconsistent with the justice of God, and therefore impossible. And if so, these universal influences and the salva

tion resulting from them in all who believe the Gospel were a part of the purpose for which God gave His Son to die. In other words, the purpose of the death of Christ embraced the entire human race.

Against this plain teaching, there is in the Bible nothing to set.

In Ephesians v. 25 St. Paul writes that "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself upon its behalf"; and in Acts xx. 28, in an address to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, he speaks of "the Church, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Similarly, in John x. 11, 15 Christ declares that He was about to lay down His life for the sheep; and in chapter xv. 13 He compares His love for His disciples to that of a man who lays down his life for his friends. In xi. 52, the Evangelist, commenting on some words of Caiaphas, says that Christ was about to die in order that the scattered sheep of God may be gathered together. But this limited view of the purpose of the death of Christ by no means contradicts the universal purpose asserted in the passages quoted above. For the wider purpose includes the narrower. Indeed the limited and the unlimited aspects of the purpose of salvation are stated together in 1 John ii. 2, iv. 9, 14, 1 Timothy iv. 10. In His eternal purpose of salvation, Christ foresaw its accomplishment in the actual salvation of so many as He foresaw would accept salvation. These were, therefore, in a special sense the objects of His purpose. But, inasmuch as God resolved to bring to bear on all men influences which, if yielded to, will lead each one to salvation, both Christ and St. Paul speak of the purpose of salvation as universal.

That this wider purpose is not excluded by the narrower purpose embodied in the passages quoted above, is proved by two passages in which we have a still narrower view of the purpose of the incarnation and death of Christ. To the Christians at Corinth St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians

viii. 9, "our Lord Jesus Christ for your sake became poor, though He was rich, in order that ye, by His poverty, may become rich." Thinking of his readers only, the Apostle leaves out of sight for a moment all others for whom Christ became poor. Similarly, thinking of himself only, he writes in Galatians ii. 20, "who loved me and gave up Himself on my behalf."

It is worthy of note that in all the limited passages quoted above the death of Christ is not the main topic in hand, but is quoted casually to illustrate some other matter.

While speaking of the foreseen results of the death of Christ, we must carefully avoid the error of supposing that man's foreseen faith prompted the gift of Christ. Of this we have no hint in the Bible. Indeed, it is excluded by the teaching of St. Paul in Romans iv. 4, Ephesians ii. 8, 9, Titus iii. 5 that salvation is by grace, not by works. For, if man's foreseen faith moved God to save, faith would itself be a meritorious act. The teaching of the entire New Testament is that God's purpose to save was prompted simply by His pity for ruined man; but that, in His purpose to save, God resolved to save, not all men indiscriminately, but only those who should accept salvation. Consequently, salvation is entirely a work and gift of God, but the destruction of the lost is caused only by their own refusal of salvation. If so, Christ died in a special sense for the Church which He had chosen to be His spotless bride; and in a very real sense for all mankind.

Accepting as I do, and as we must do unless we are prepared to charge with serious error both the Apostle Paul and all the early followers of Christ whose writings have come down to us, the harmonious teaching of the New Testament about the death of Christ as true, I shall now sum up the results of our inquiry in a definite and consistent doctrinal statement.

We must conceive that in the eternal past God resolved to create intelligent beings capable of accepting or rejecting His will as the guide of their lives, that He resolved to place them under law, and to make their well-being or ruin contingent on their obedience or disobedience. Thus both man and the law which proclaims the inevitable sequence of sin and death have their source in the nature of God.

God foresaw man's sin, and foresaw the barrier which sin must necessarily erect between man and God. This barrier could be broken down only by some such demonstration of the inevitable sequence of sin and death as that which we find in the death of Christ for man's sin. Yet in full view of this necessity God resolved to save. And, in order to harmonize with His own justice the deliverance of the guilty from the due punishment of their sins, He resolved to give His Son to become Man and to die upon the cross.

God resolved to save, not all men indiscriminately, but all those who should accept the offered salvation. Thus man's freedom, which was an all-important element in the original purpose of creation, is respected in God's purpose of salvation.

Since none can turn to God and rise towards God except as led and raised by Him, He resolved to bring to bear on all men influences leading them towards Himself and towards the way of life, influences real though not irresistible, and to save all those, and those only, who yield themselves to these influences. Since, apart from the death of Christ, to rescue sinners from the penalty of their sins would be unjust and therefore impossible, these influences leading to salvation must be a result of the death of Christ. And, if so, the whole of salvation from the first good desire to final victory over death is a result of the same. On the other hand, the destruction of the lost is a result, not of

any limitation in God's purpose to save, but simply and only of their own resistance to divine influences.

This account of the purpose of the death of Christ is in harmony with all that is said by the various writers of the New Testament about the death of Christ. It is the designed and absolutely necessary means of man's salvation, the ransom of his life and the propitiation for his sins. He died in our stead: and through His death we are dead to sin, to the law, and to the world. Thus through the death of the Author of Life man shares the immortal life of Him who was raised from the dead.

Around the cross of Christ have bowed in silent adoration for more than eighteen centuries multitudes of men and women of every age and race and rank and degree of culture. On that cross they have seen a supreme manifestation of that infinite love which is the inmost essence of God. In that sight they have found the strongest stimulus to virtue and to beneficence of every kind. And, moved by the love which shines forth from that cross, not a few have dared to die for Him who first died for them.

No system of Theology, and no account of Christianity, can be in the least degree satisfactory unless it does something to explain the mighty moral influence of that mysterious death which to so many has been the light of life.

For the imperfection of this attempt to reproduce and elucidate the teaching of the New Testament, I must crave forgiveness on the ground of the supreme difficulty of the subject.

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NOTE.—Among many other valuable works on the topic discussed in these papers, I may call attention to DR. DALE's admirable Lectures on THE ATONEMENT, and to a most useful volume by DR. CAVE on THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF SACRIFICE. But these works are too well known to need commendation from me.