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FOUR SERMONS

ON

THE DOCTRINE

OF

THE ATONEMENT.

- I. THE NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT.
- II. ITS NATURE.
- III. ITS NATURE.
- IV. ITS EXTENT.

BY NATHAN S. S. BEMAN,
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TROY:

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Northern District of New-York, to wit:



BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the Eleventh day of October, in the Forty-ninth year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1824, NATHAN S. S. BEMAN, of the said District, hath deposited in this Office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as Author in the words following, to wit :

“ Four Sermons on the Doctrine of the Atonement. I. The necessity of the Atonement. II. Its Nature. III. Its Nature. IV. Its Extent. By Nathan S. S. Beman, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Troy.”

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled “ An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned ;” and also, to the act entitled “ An act supplementary to an act entitled ‘ An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, Engraving and Etching historical and other prints.”

R. R. LANSING, *Clerk*
Of the Northern District of New-York,

TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
Presbyterian Church & Congregation
IN THE CITY OF TROY ;
FOR WHOM THE FOLLOWING SERMONS WERE ORIGINALLY
PREPARED,
AND FOR WHOSE MORE IMMEDIATE BENEFIT THEY ARE NOW
PUBLISHED,
THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
BY THEIR FRIEND
AND PASTOR
The Author.

PREFACE.



THE following Sermons, on the Doctrine of the Atonement, were not originally designed for the press. They were prepared, and preached to the congregation, in the month of October, 1823, and are now given to the publick for reasons which the author deems it his duty and privilege frankly to state.

These Sermons, he has reason to believe, were the means of doing good, at the time they were delivered. They excited considerable attention to this great and fundamental doctrine of the Christian system, and imparted, as he hopes, some instruction to those who had not made this doctrine, in all its relations, a subject of particular and critical investigation. A request was made, by a number of individuals, whose judgment the author highly respects, for their publication, when first delivered—but a compliance with that request was deferred for the present.

Since that period the doctrine of the Atonement has become, in various forms, the subject of publick discussion. Several sermons, on this important point in theology, have been recently published, and these sermons

have been subjected to two or three times the number of reviews. This doctrine is one which is fairly before the churches, and, in this state of inquiry and investigation, the writer of these pages has thought best to add this little volume to the productions, on this subject, already in the hands of the christian publick. Whether his decision, in this matter, has been expedient, or for the best, must be left for others to determine.

But it may be thought by some, that there is no demand for another treatise on this doctrine. In reply to this suggestion, the following considerations have occurred to the author. The more elaborate works, on this subject, such as Edwards, West, Griffin and Magee, are not in the hands of every christian reader; and if they were, these works are, in some instances, too voluminous, and, in others, perhaps too intricate for many who might read, with interest and profit, a treatise of greater simplicity, or brevity. These sermons are designed to fill an *humbler*, but perhaps not a less *useful* place, than that occupied by these more critical and finished productions. As to single sermons, and especially those which have been recently published, on this doctrine, they have generally aimed at the discussion of some one point, or they have been designed to combat what was deemed some local error; and, consequently, they have presented but a partial view of this subject.

Another fact has had considerable weight. In this region works on the Atonement, have not been much read ; and it is thought that something published here, may be perused by many who might not otherwise direct their attention particularly to the investigation of this subject.

An apology is due to the publick for the delay which has attended this work. The simple matter of fact is this. The pecuniary situation of the writer, would not authorize this publication on any other terms than that of subscription. Proposals, for this purpose, were issued several months since, but sufficient attention was not devoted to this business, in order to obtain the requisite number of subscribers, till the present time.

These sermons will, no doubt, be found, in many respects, very defective ; but such as they are, they are now committed to the candid and prayerful perusal of the publick, and to the ultimate and sovereign disposal of the great head of the church.

TROY, December, 1824.

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SERMON I.

THE NECESSITY OF AN ATONEMENT.



HEBREWS, ix. 22.—“*Without shedding of blood is no remission.*”

THERE are two distinct methods in which God reveals himself to rational creatures. One is by the dispensation of the law, and the other, by the dispensation of the gospel. The moral law has annexed life to perfect and uninterrupted obedience. It is by the equitable awards of this law, that the angels participate the bliss of heaven ; and, by the terms of the same legal covenant, too, Adam, and all his posterity, would have been exalted to a triumphant immortality, had sin never entered our system, or diffused its poison through our hearts.—But to sinners, the moral law is the ministration of death ! It speaks terrors to the conscience now ; and where pardon is not obtained, its accents will grow more and more terrific while eternal ages shall endure. This is the certain effect of being abandoned to the penal operation of the law. Like the arm of Jehovah, the penalty of the law, in such a case as this, cannot, and will not bend.

It is the gospel alone which proposes a remedy for human transgression ; and, in this gospel, the doctrine

of the atonement is fundamental. So numerous, and so important are the bearings of this doctrine upon the gospel scheme, that if you annihilate the atonement, you have no gospel left. There is no way in which God, consistently with the principles of the divine law, can forgive the sinner; for "without shedding of blood is no remission."

In this part of his epistle to the Hebrews, the apostle is discussing the typical import of those rites which were enjoined by the law of Moses—and particularly of those sacrifices whose blood was considered essential to the forgiveness of sin. The *ritual* or *ceremonial law*, of which the apostle is treating in the context, was the gospel in type or shadow; and the offerings which were enjoined by that law, derived all their efficacy from Jesus Christ, who was, in the fullness of time, to appear in our world, and "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Under this law, or the typical dispensation, the victim was slain, or his blood was shed; and through this significant ceremony, as prefiguring "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," pardon and eternal life were obtained.

"Almost all things were by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission." The *law* here spoken of, is not the *moral*, but the *ceremonial* law, which, as we have before intimated, was the gospel of Christ exhibited or expressed by symbols. Under *that* dispensation, as well as under the *present*, there could be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood; without shedding the blood of the *typical sacri-*

aces which pointed to Christ; and without shedding the blood of Christ himself, from whom these *ceremonial* or *legal* sacrifices derived their sanctifying and saving power. "Without shedding of blood is no remission."— These words assert the necessity of an atonement to the forgiveness of sin; and to this purpose we shall apply them in this discourse.

The necessity of an atonement, is the subject of our present remarks. We premise in the

First place, That an atonement for sin was *not* necessary, as some have supposed, to incline God the Father to the exercise of mercy.

Few doctrines of the christian system have caused more controversy in the world than the doctrine of the atonement; and it may be affirmed with equal truth, that it has been often misunderstood and mis-stated by its friends as well as its enemies. One fruitful source of misconception and confusion in relation to this point, is the very common fault of attributing a literal meaning to the figurative language which frequently occurs in the bible when treating of this doctrine. The nature of these figurative representations will be more particularly considered on a future occasion. It is sufficient for our present purpose to remark, that many appear erroneously to suppose, that the atonement was intended to incline God to exercise mercy towards our guilty race.

The representation of the affair, in their minds, is something like this. God had threatened the transgres-

sor with eternal punishment, and till the whole amount of suffering due to the sinner, be inflicted on his substitute, God has no compassion for the rebel, and no disposition to save him. The debt must be legally paid, and then the prisoner may be released; the ransom must be literally offered, and then the captive can be redeemed.

This view of the necessity of an atonement, would forever annihilate the divine attribute of mercy. But we wish not to press this point for the present. We conceive, that God was as much inclined to have mercy upon our world *without* an atonement as *with* it, provided, at the same time, it could be done with equal propriety and safety. The atonement was in no sense the exciting cause of mercy to the sinner, but was merely the means selected by infinite wisdom for the expression of this mercy without the sacrifice of the moral government of God. The existence of the attribute of mercy, and the inclination to its exercise too, was, like God himself, *eternal*; and the atonement operated not as a *bribe* upon the divine feelings, but served merely to render the pardon and salvation of the sinner consistent with the other principles or perfections of his nature. Thus the atonement was not the cause of mercy, but the mode in which mercy was to be expressed. But

Secondly. The atonement *was* necessary, as an expression of God's regard for the moral law.

The importance and value of the moral law, cannot have escaped the observation of any intelligent and reflecting mind. This law is, in every respect, adapted

to the rational universe. Under its operation all heaven is full of happiness ; and were its authority universally revered, and its precept universally obeyed, the constituents of heavenly felicity would be found in every place.

Both the precept and the penalty of the moral law, are infinitely excellent. Its demands and sanctions are just what they should be ; they are what God approves, and what tend to the peace and order and happiness of intelligent beings. So perfect is this rule of action, that where there is no transgression, there can be no suffering. All *natural* evil, or *misery*, is the consequence of *moral* evil, or *sin*. The penalty of the moral law, is just as important as the precept ; and the regard which God entertains for the latter, must be just as strong as the regard which he cherishes for the former. His love to the precept of the law, will be regulated by the quantity of good which the practical operation of this precept, when cordially obeyed, is calculated and intended to produce ; and his love for the penalty, will be in exact proportion to the practical evils which result from transgression. In one word, God loves the whole law, comprising both the precept and the penalty, as he loves himself ; or as he loves the order and happiness of the universe.

Now it appears to us, that this regard or affection of God for the moral law, renders an atonement necessary to the salvation of the sinner. Man has violated the precept of this law, and he is, consequently, exposed to its penalty. In his treatment of man, God must eith-

er take sides with the law, or he must take sides with the transgressor. Should he receive the sinner into favour notwithstanding the violated precept and the threatened penalty of the law, he would give evidence that he had abandoned this rule of moral action; and that, in the case of redeemed man, at least, the transgressor of the law, stands on the same ground as those who have never trampled upon its precept. We say, that such a course would imply an abandonment of the moral law. In this case, God would say, by a publick act—an act which is connected with eternal consequences, that he is willing to wink at the violations of the preceptive requirement, and to dispense with the penal sanctions of this correct and holy rule.

We know from the bible and from the nature of the case, that God must cherish an affection infinitely strong for the moral law. It is a part of himself. It is an index of his own feelings in relation to spiritual or moral acts. It is an expression of his regard for the harmony and happiness of moral agents or the rational creation. In God's treatment of sinners, we know of but two ways in which he can continue to give evidence of his affection for the moral law. One is by executing the penalty in its full force and without mitigation upon every transgressor, and the other is by requiring such an atonement for sin as shall answer, in the moral government of God, the same purpose intended to be secured by the infliction of the threatened curse. Should the former course be pursued, every individual of our race, must perish forever. There would be no distinction between the condition of fallen angels, and the condition of fallen

man. That heavy curse which consigns the soul to eternal death, would fall upon us without discrimination and without hope.

It would appear then, that one of the following things must be true—that God must give up the moral law and save the sinner without an atonement ; or he may continue to cherish his regard for this law and condemn the sinner for ever ; or he may love the law with an undiminished and eternal affection, and, at the same time, save the sinner, provided such an atonement be made and accepted as shall answer every purpose which could be effected by the literal and rigid execution of the penalty of the law itself. As important and necessary, then, as it is that God should cherish and express a supreme regard for his own good and perfect law—so important and necessary is it, that God should require an atonement in order to the pardon and salvation of the sinner.

Thirdly. The atonement was necessary, in order to evince the divine determination to punish sin, or to execute the penalty of the law.

The penalty of the moral law which is the second death, or death eternal, was expressive of the divine displeasure against transgression. Sin is that hateful thing with which God has no communion. He does and must hate it with a perfect and eternal hatred. This he has said in the penalty of the divine law—and this penalty, like the precept, is “holy, and just, and good.” The curse of the law was annexed by God himself, and

it was *then*, and ever *will* be expressive of his own moral feelings.

The penalty of the law is contained in such passages as these :—“ In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die ”—“ The soul that sinneth it shall die ”—“ Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. ” In the case of the sinner who is saved, it is evident that these threatenings are not *literally* fulfilled. Now suppose the sinner had been taken out of the hands of the law and shielded from its penalty, without the adoption of any measures on the part of God to change the moral relations of this sinner—without any expression of the divine feelings towards the transgressor which should evince that God took sides against him with the law—without any atonement which should come in the place of the literal execution of the penalty of the law—and what evidence could we have, that God still regards not only the preceptive requirement, but the penal sanction of this law with approbation, and is determined to execute the threatened curse upon the wanton transgressor? The act which would save a sinner in these circumstances, would leave the penalty of the law a dead letter. It would introduce infinite confusion into the moral government of God! It would be an act of violence to the holy sanction of the law, by forcibly wresting the criminal from the hands of justice, by exempting him from punishment, and by restoring him to peculiar favour. As no reason would appear to the universe, in this case, why God should thus interpose between the penalty of the law and the transgressor—the salvation of the sinner,

in such circumstances, would furnish no inconsiderable evidence, that the feelings of God had changed in relation to sin and the penalty of the law. There could be no certainty, that he ever would punish, or that any threatened evil would ever be inflicted. The consequence would be, the prostration of all law and government, and the introduction of a wide-spread and wasting anarchy.

If the moral law, with its awful and eternal sanctions, was ever necessary to the welfare of the rational system, it must always continue to be so ; and God, as the moral governour, must so manage all his operations, whether of justice or of mercy, as to leave upon the minds of dependant creatures a deep impression, that the penalty of the law will be executed, and that the sinner must perish. But this leads us to remark,

Fourthly. That the necessity of an atonement will farther appear, if we contemplate the relations of this doctrine with the rational universe.

All the operations of God, as the moral governour, must necessarily be publick, and are intended to make a publick impression, or an impression upon rational creatures. Moral beings are governed by motives—and almost all the motives which are operative and efficient, particularly those of a holy character, have some connection with the government of God—that is with his publick administration.

We may very naturally suppose, that it was the intention of God, in saving sinners, to make a grand im-

pression upon the universe ; and we believe the necessity of an atonement will strikingly appear, if we trace the different and opposite effects which would probably be produced upon intelligent beings by the salvation of men either with or without a propitiation or sacrifice for sin.

What effect would the salvation of sinners without an atonement, probably have upon the angels of heaven ? Aside from the scheme of redemption, they know God principally through the medium of the moral law. They feel the spirit, and comprehend the principles of this law much more perfectly than we do, or are capable of doing in the present world. They have always been accustomed to view this law as perfect, both in precept and penalty, and they have, no doubt, ever associated with disobedience, the certain and eternal curse of God. In the case of their fellow angels, who once shone as morning stars with them, they have seen the first act of rebellion followed by instantaneous and everlasting banishment from heaven. This example has taught them to revere the law, and to expect the infliction of the penalty upon every transgressor. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," speaks not only in the written penalty of the law, but it *now* resounds through heaven, in its execution, in tones as loud and solemn as eternal flames can utter ! Every angel feels the impression which this publick act is calculated to make ; and while he dreads, with a new sensation, the penalty, he clings more closely to the precept of the law. But suppose the provisions of this law were entirely set aside, in our world, as would be the case if sinful men were to be saved without an

atonement, and what impression would this act probably make upon the angels of God? There would be in the treatment of apostate angels and apostate men, two opposite and conflicting acts in relation to the infractions of the same law; and the mystery involved in these acts, the most exalted Seraphim in heaven, could never comprehend or solve! They could have no evidence *now*, that God will punish the sinner by inflicting the penalty of the law. Their personal observation of the divine conduct is limited to two facts or examples; in the former, the sentence was executed; in the latter, according to the supposition, the transgressor was shielded from the threatened and impending curse. To them no reason appears why the conduct of God, in the one case, should be different from his conduct in the other. The final impression which would be made upon their minds by these facts would be, that God may or may not execute the penalty of the violated law upon the sinner.—Such a course of conduct would be calculated to shake the very confidence of angels in the government of God, and to prostrate his authority even in the empire of heaven.

But angels are not the only creatures concerned in this business. Men are the inspectors of the divine conduct, and their opinions of the character of God, must be essentially influenced by the manner in which sinners are saved. Even redeemed man, if his salvation were effected without a propitiation for sin, on comparing his condition as an heir of glory with the penalty of the law which might have been inflicted upon him, and which he deserved to feel, would be thrown into utter and infinite

confusion. He must consider his salvation as brought about in direct opposition to the principles of the law—in apparent, if not manifest, defiance of the threatened curse ; and with all his veneration for the divine character, he could not vindicate, even to his own satisfaction, the divine conduct in this act. The most which could be said by way of apology would be, that mercy had triumphed over justice. In a private individual this might be considered an amiable weakness—but in a judge, even upon a human tribunal, it would be deemed a sacrifice of principle—and in the moral governour of the universe, it must involve a direct contradiction of his former declarations, and consequently evince, as far as creatures could determine, a diminution of hatred for sin and a loss of affection for the penalty of the law. And if these might be the reflections of a redeemed sinner, what would probably be the reflections of an impenitent sinner? It would be impossible to make him believe, that the threatening of the law would be inflicted on any. And when condemned, in the day of judgment, his mouth could not be sealed in eternal silence, as it will be under the operation of that system which includes an atonement.

As it respects fallen angels, they would be thrown into equal perplexity by the salvation of man without a propitiation for sin. In their own case, the penalty of the law is executed without delay—upon a part of the human family, in the process of time, the same penalty is inflicted, while another part of this sinful family are shielded from the curse, received into favour, and eventually taken to heaven. Now let all this be done without

an atonement, and, in the estimation of fallen angels, you create war between God and his own eternal law. You make his publick and solemn acts—acts on which are suspended eternal consequences—opposite and contradictory and irreconcilable to each other. You render him, at least, apparently mutable and capricious in his feelings toward the law, and his treatment of transgressors.

But let an atonement intervene—such an atonement as we shall attempt to describe in a future discourse, and this darkness which would otherwise hang around the divine administration, and these perplexities, are dissipated at once. It is on Calvary that justice consents to the exercise of mercy. The death of Christ, so far as the honour of the divine law and the dignity of the divine government is concerned, has become a complete substitute for the death of the sinner ; and no practical principle of law or government, is now sacrificed in his salvation. If the penalty of the broken law is not literally executed, *that* has been done or effected by the atonement, as we shall hereafter show, which will place the moral government of God on higher and more solid ground than could have been done by the infliction of the curse upon the sinner himself. This the angels of heaven already see. This the redeemed sinner feels, and will continue to feel to all eternity. This is, no doubt, understood by apostate angels ; and this will be comprehended and acknowledged by sinners from our world, who, by the rejection of the gospel, shall hereafter become their companions in the world of despair.

Much more might be said on this subject, but what has now been advanced is deemed sufficient to establish the point, that an atonement *was* necessary in order to open a consistent way for the pardon and salvation of the sinner.

A few PRACTICAL REMARKS will close our discourse.

First. This subject teaches us our obligations to God for providing an atonement for our guilty race.

The condition of the human family as sinners, without an atonement, may be easily discovered in connection with the preceding discourse. If nothing had been contrived or executed, on the part of God, to change the moral relations of sinners, their condition would be precisely that which is contemplated and pointed out by the law. The moral law makes but a single demand, and this demand is perfect obedience; and if this be withheld, it points out no course, it prescribes no alternative, but the execution of the penalty. It makes no compromise with the transgressor—it proposes no terms of accommodation—it publishes no overtures of peace.—These things are no part of the legal covenant. It continues to require obedience—and it must inflict eternal punishment for want of a full and cheerful compliance with this demand. All men are transgressors of the moral law, and, by the terms of this law, all men must perish for ever. From this condition, no creature can deliver us. Our own efforts cannot change our relations to the law—and even angels, were they to embark in our favour, could render us no essential service. The

law must go on to inflict that death which it threatens, unless God himself provide a remedy. No being can do it, but the author of the law. And no expedient can furnish a remedy, except one which shall answer the same purpose as the execution of the penal threatening. This expedient, or provision, is to be found in the atonement made by Jesus Christ. It is by this atonement, that the condition of men is made to differ from the condition of devils. While the latter are given up to the punitive operation of the law, the former are placed under a dispensation of mercy.

For this distinction we are indebted to the sovereign goodness of God. It was his law, that demanded our blood; and it was his wisdom, that contrived a way in which the honour of the law could be supported, and his mercy restore and save the sinner. For this wonderful plan, we owe eternal gratitude to God.

Secondly. Pardon, without an atonement, must have led to the subversion of moral government.

The rational universe, considered as responsible agents, are governed by motives. These motives are addressed to hopes and fears, and to every principle of rational calculation. The penalty of the law, by showing the consequences of transgression, becomes a powerful motive to obedience. The execution of this penalty upon the transgressor, must have a practical effect upon all who witness the solemn transaction. They see the consistency of the threatening with its actual infliction. The publick declaration and the publick act of

the law-giver, are in this case, coincident one with the other. But should this penalty be set aside, and no substitute, as it respects the divine government, be introduced, the authority of law is prostrated at once. The threatening of the law-giver, as expressed in the letter, is contradicted by his subsequent publick conduct. In the law he has said, the transgressor "shall die,"—in his providence, or in the course of his administration, he says, the transgressor shall live, and inherit the kingdom of heaven. As the divine conduct will speak louder than the divine declaration, the penalty of the law would, in time, be looked upon as an empty threatening which was never intended to be carried into execution. This would be the impression made not only upon our world, but upon all worlds. The penalty of the law is completely and for ever annihilated; and as a statute without a sanction is a dead letter, you have a universe without law. What is now called the moral law, instead of binding the creature to perpetual obedience and consigning the transgressor to endless perdition, becomes a mere matter of admonition or advice. As the whole authority of God, is embodied in the penalty of the law, by destroying this penalty, you prostrate the authority of the independent moral Governour. You have now no government left in the universe. This would be the effect of making the penalty of the law bend to the case of the sinner. This would be the consequence of saving sinners without an atonement—without an adequate substitute for the literal infliction of the threatened curse. We hesitate not to say, that it would be better for Adam and all his posterity to perish, than for these consequences to result from their salvation. We venture to affirm,

that God would sooner crush a thousand worlds and wrap their inhabitants in eternal flames, than to suffer the stability of his throne, in this manner, to be shaken, or the consistency of his moral government to be thus impeached.

Thirdly. The rejection of the doctrine of the atonement, mars the whole system of gospel truth.

Strike out this doctrine from the book of God, and you take away every thing peculiar and precious from the gospel of Christ. Remove the atonement, and what remains of the gospel becomes another system—a system incapable of bringing glory to God or consolation to man.

How entirely different from the gospel scheme, is that system which is sometimes inculcated for christian doctrine. Instead of the Great Atoning Victim who was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself—Jesus Christ is represented as a Great Prophet, raised up for the sole purpose of teaching a more perfect system of moral precepts than had ever before been delivered to our race—to confirm these precepts by his example, and thus to point out the way to a better world. With this system the Deity and Atonement of Christ, have no connection. The evil of sin is not estimated by the holiness of that God against whom it is committed; and the penalty of the law is set aside as a matter of no consequence to the universe. To the convicted sinner, this system opens no door of hope; to the troubled conscience it imparts no celestial balm. This, in the language of the

apostle Paul, is "another gospel"—and with him we may say, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

The downward progress of sentiment when the doctrine of the atonement is rejected, is matter of publick notoriety. The divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, we need not observe, are swept away as a natural and necessary consequence. Sin, which may be pardoned without any expression of God's feelings of disapprobation, is considered as a trivial fault; and no great veneration is entertained for a law whose requirements and penalty may be easily dispensed with, in order to accommodate and rescue a depraved and rebellious creature. When the moral law is thus degraded, no great affection can be cherished for the gospel; for the gospel derives all its value from the fact, that it opens a way of salvation for those who are justly and for ever condemned by the law. When the requirements and sanctions of the law, and the provisions of the gospel, are thus prostrated, little veneration will be felt for the bible. It may continue nominally to occupy the place of an inspired volume, but one offensive or mysterious part after another, will be lopped off, till, though received in the gross, it is rejected in detail. While one hand is ostensibly employed in pressing the holy Oracles to the heart, the other is busy in plucking out the leaves and in committing them to the flames. We have now arrived upon the borders of open infidelity—and should the remaining belief in the being of a God be too painful for the conscience, Atheism may constitute the last

item in the melancholy and downward series. Such has been the progress of thousands who have begun their declension, by denying the important and fundamental doctrine of the atonement. As we would wish, my brethren, that we may not be left to make war upon the bible, and that our last hope of safety may not be extinguished in eternal darkness, let us cling to the doctrine of our text—"without shedding of blood is no remission."

SERMON II.

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT.



GAL. iii. 13.—“*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.*”

IN a former discourse, we undertook to show, that the doctrine of the atonement, is a fundamental article in the christian system, and an essential pre-requisite to the salvation of fallen man. The necessity of such a provision was, in that place, urged on the ground, that this was the only way in which God could furnish an expression of his regard for the moral law, evince his determination to punish sin or execute the penalty of the law, and thus to vindicate his character and establish his government in the estimation of the rational universe—while he extends pardon and eternal life to the sinner.

That an atonement embracing and securing these objects, has been made, is abundantly asserted in the sacred volume. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “But God commendeth his love towards us, in

that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”—
“In due time Christ died for the ungodly.” “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.” “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.”

Believing that the necessity of an atonement has been fully established, and relying upon the truth of those declarations of the bible in which it is asserted, that Jesus Christ has made such an atonement as was demanded by the condition of the sinner, the character of God and the honour of the law, it becomes a matter by no means of trivial importance to ascertain and define the nature of that satisfaction which he has rendered to God on our behalf. Much indistinctness and confusion have existed, and do still exist, in the christian church, in relation to this point. Persons who contend earnestly for the doctrine of the atonement, nevertheless differ as to its nature; and differ so considerably too, that it is far from being a matter of idle speculation to inquire which side of this question, is supported by reason and revealed truth. Our object in this inquiry is not controversy, but candid and christian discussion.

As it respects the nature of the atonement made by Jesus Christ, two opinions deserve our particular notice. One opinion supposes the Redeemer to be in a strict and literal sense the representative of the elect—and to have suffered for them, as their substitute, the penalty of the law; and those for whom he thus suffered, are, on legal

principles, eventually liberated from the curse, and restored to the favour of God. The other opinion represents the Lord Jesus as suffering, not the literal penalty of the law, but that which would furnish, in the moral government of God, an adequate and practical substitute for the infliction of this penalty upon transgressors, so far as they shall welcome the provisions of this atonement, or, in other words, so far as divine mercy shall interpose for their salvation. The distinction here made will be clearly understood in the progress of that discussion which will occupy our attention in the present and the following discourse.

It is supposed by some, that the atonement made by Jesus Christ, consisted in his suffering, in a strict and literal sense, the penalty of the law in the room of his people. To examine this sentiment, and to show its incorrectness, is the object of our present remarks.

And here it may be proper to premise, that the scriptures frequently describe the atonement in language of a figurative character ; and the literal construction which has been put upon this language has, no doubt, sometimes embarrassed the subject and misled the honest inquirer. We are informed by the pen of inspiration, that Christ "hath purchased" the church "with his own blood." Christians are said to be "bought with a price." Christ was "made a curse for us"—and "he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." These and many other passages of similar import, are often pressed into a literal exposition, while their figurative character is entirely overlooked. When the scriptures

tell us, that Christ “hath purchased” the church, or that believers “are bought with a price,” they do not intend to teach us, that the salvation of sinners through the atonement, is a pecuniary transaction, and regulated according to the principles of debt and credit; but that their salvation was effected, in the moral government of God, by nothing less than the consideration—the stipulated consideration of the death of his beloved Son.—When it is asserted, in our text, that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us”—we are to understand, that Christ was himself treated as an accursed being, in his death upon the cross, that the mercy of God, through this great transaction, might save the sinner from the curse, or the threatened penalty of the law. If he was made “to be sin for us,” it was in a sense which consisted with perfect innocence—for he “knew no sin.” And when he suffered, it was “the *just* for the *unjust*.” But some of these passages will come under a more critical review in another place.

To these figurative expressions are superadded others of human origin—such as these: “Christ has paid our debt—has answered the demands of the law, and satisfied the justice of God in our behalf.” If we say that Christ has paid our debt, it is true only in a figurative sense; and can mean no more nor less than this, that the sufferings of Christ accomplished the same purpose, in the divine administration, which would have been accomplished by our rejection and punishment. If he has answered the demands of the law, or satisfied the justice of God, by the atonement, we cannot mean, that the

law has really inflicted the penalty which it threatened against the transgressor, or that the divine justice took its natural course when the innocent suffered, and the guilty were spared. The purpose or intention of the law, is answered ; and the law-giver who is the inflexible and immaculate guardian of the law, is satisfied by the atonement. He is so well satisfied, that he suspends the penalty of the law which would fall upon the sinner, and upon no one else—so well satisfied, that he arrests the hand of justice which would consign the rebel to eternal flames, and rescues this same rebel, as a penitent and believing sinner, by the intervention of his sovereign grace.

That Jesus Christ did not, in a strict and literal sense, suffer the penalty of the law, as the substitute of his people, may be established by the following considerations.

First. This idea of the atonement would involve a transfer of characters, which is inconsistent with the principles of reason and scripture.

Those who contend, that Christ literally suffered the penalty of the law in the room of his people, in such a sense that justice has no farther demand upon them ; that he paid their debt in such a sense, that they must receive a legal discharge, have contrived a kind of commutation of moral character between Christ and those for whom he died, in order to justify the positions assumed in relation to this doctrine. Substitution and imputation, are intimately connected with this sentiment, and

ought to be examined and explained. In this system, Christ is the legal substitute of the elect, and their sins are so imputed to him, that Christ becomes liable to the penalty of the law, and those for whom he suffers, are, in due time, necessarily and legally exempted from the curse. We do by no means intend to deny the doctrines of substitution and imputation, but to this construction of them, we do enter our entire and unqualified dissent. It is for ever impossible, in the very nature of things, that Christ should become liable to suffer that punishment which the law denounced against the transgressor—and against him alone. The law has no penal demand against Christ—and such a demand it can never establish. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” is the threatening of the law. Against the innocent it contains no commination, it utters no curse, and, in this case, the law can, in strict propriety, inflict no punishment. The idea, that Christ so took the legal place of the sinner, and that the iniquities of his people were so imputed to him, that the law required his death and justice demanded the release of those for whom he expired, appears to us unscriptural and absurd. The law can have no penal demand except against the offender. With a substitute it has no concern; and though a thousand substitutes should die, the law, in itself considered and left to its own natural operation, would have the same demand upon the transgressor which it always had. This claim can never be invalidated. This penal demand can never be extinguished. Fully aware of the truth of these positions, some have pushed the theory of substitution to meet the exigencies of the case. The sins of his people, say they, were so laid upon Christ, that he became,

in the eye of the law, the sinner, and was legally punished to the full amount of all that demerit which was attached to the sins of those who will finally be saved by his blood. This is a common idea of substitution.—But this idea involves a literal transfer of characters. On this scheme Christ, and not man, is the sinner. But Christ and man cannot exchange characters, because sin and holiness are personal, and cannot be transferred from one moral being to another. The sinful or holy act of one person, may, in a thousand ways, affect another—exert an influence upon his happiness or misery—but it can never be so transferred as to become his sinful or holy act. The bible always represents Christ as holy, and men as unholy ; and the children of God, while they have felt themselves vitally interested in the atonement made by Christ, have confessed their own sins, and relied for pardon and acceptance upon the mercy of God alone. Certainly this looks very little like having so obeyed the law and suffered its penalty, in the person of a substitute, as to be discharged, on legal principles, from guilt and liability to punishment.

In what sense Christ was the sinner's substitute, and in what sense sin was imputed to Christ, will more fully appear in the progress of this discussion. Let it suffice, for the present, to remark, that whatever Christ suffered, he suffered as an innocent being—not on legal principles, but by express stipulation or covenant with the Father. He did not assume the character of the sinner, and could not, in a literal sense, endure that curse which the law pronounces alone upon the guilty. He suffered and died, "the just for the unjust"—and those suffer-

ings which he endured as a holy being, were intended, in the case of all those who are finally saved, as a substitute for the infliction of the penalty of the law. We say a substitute for the infliction of the penalty ; for the penalty itself, if to be executed at all, must fall upon the sinner, and upon no one else. But—

Secondly. That idea of atonement which supposes that Christ literally suffered the penalty of the law for those who shall finally be saved, destroys all mercy in God the Father.

According to this system, the persons of the Trinity are not perfectly harmonious in their feelings respecting man's salvation. The eternal Father, as the guardian of the law and the governor of the universe, it would seem, has no pity for sinners and no disposition to save them, aside from the atonement ; and this atonement which procures his assent to the salvation of fallen man, involves a full and literal infliction of the penalty of the law. At least, something like this representation of the affair, is given by some. But if the penal denunciation of the law be expressly executed, then justice has no farther demand ; and God, as the God of justice, has no farther demand.

Where then is the mercy, the rich and sovereign mercy, displayed in the redemption of sinners—and whose praise has been sung on earth, and will be for ever sung in heaven ? Certainly, if justice has had its full demand, there can be no room for the exercise of mercy.

But it may be said, that the mercy to the sinner is just the same whether he be saved with or without an atonement; whether this atonement involved a literal infliction of the penalty of the law, or whether it embraced sufferings which were accepted in the place of that curse which was denounced against him as a transgressor. Be it so, that the mercy to redeemed man is the same; but by whom is this mercy exercised? Surely not by God the Father. It is a vital principle of that scheme against which we contend, to represent the Father as rigidly insisting upon the infliction of the whole penalty of the law, before he consents to the offer of salvation to a rebellious world. Every particle of this curse must be inflicted. Every jot and tittle of the law must be executed.

Now, if, when the penalty of the law was about to fall on sinners, the Son of God came forward and endured the exact amount of that suffering due, on legal principles, to these sinners, be the number great or small, then the whole mercy involved in their redemption is expressed by Christ alone. The Father as one of the persons of the Trinity, is inflexibly just without any inclination to the exercise of mercy; while the Son is so merciful, that he has suffered the most rigid demands of the law, in order to obtain the consent of the Father to the salvation of his people. This representation appears to us derogatory to the character of God. It annihilates the attribute of mercy, and represents the Son as a kind of milder Deity who has interposed and answered the stern demands of the Father, in behalf of his people, and, in this way, literally purchased them

from perdition. This view of the case does not correspond with the declaration of Christ himself respecting the Father. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." The love of God to our world, was the cause, and not the effect, of the atonement. The mercy of God needed no sacrifice to excite it. The atonement made by Christ was not necessary for this purpose. This attribute had already fixed upon its object—the salvation of sinners. The penalty of the law, in the case of those who believe and are saved, is not to be inflicted. And now the great question is, what expedient shall be adopted—what expression of the divine feelings shall be made to the universe, in order to guard the throne of God from encroachment, and secure the same objects which would have been secured by the execution of the law itself? This expedient is to be found in the atonement made by Jesus Christ, which will be more fully illustrated on a future occasion. We remark—

Thirdly. That if Christ literally endured the penalty of the law, in the room of his people, then there is no grace in their restoration to the favour of God.

The idea of debt and credit furnishes a favorite mode of illustrating the doctrine of the atonement with those who hold the system of literal and legal substitution.—Christ is said to have paid the debt for his chosen people; and, in consequence of this act of Christ, they are, on legal principles, released from future punishment.—As we totally discard this representation of the affair, it

may be proper to examine, for a moment, the figure itself, and then its application to the case in hand.

This figure is of a pecuniary or commercial character, and may be easily understood. Your neighbour becomes indebted to you in a large amount, which he is utterly unable to pay. You resort to legal coercion—institute a prosecution, and eventually lodge him in prison. A third person, actuated by benevolence, inquires into the affair—is touched with pity for the tenant of the jail—becomes his legal surety—pays the whole demand—and restores him to personal freedom. Now we ask, on what principle that man is permitted to cross the threshold of his prison? Must he come to your feet, and beg to be released; or may he boldly demand liberation on the principles of law? And when he again rejoices in the light of heaven, to whom shall he express his gratitude; to his benefactor who paid the debt, or to you who set him at liberty when the last jot and tittle of your demand was extinguished? It is manifest that you have no farther claim upon this man, because the debt is paid. He has a legal right to a discharge; and, on the score of gratitude, he is indebted to that benefactor alone who cancelled the demand.

Apply this illustration to the doctrine of the atonement. Man had violated the law of God, and, as a transgressor, was exposed to the penalty. This penalty, according to the scheme now under consideration, the law-giver is determined to enforce. The whole race are about to perish, when Christ suffers the exact penalty of the law for a certain part of these offenders; dis-

charges the whole moral demand against them; and those for whom he thus suffered, are liberated from the curse, and restored to the favor and affection of God.* Now if this be a true representation of the affair, on what principle are those persons for whom such an atonement has been made, discharged from the penalty of the law? That very threatening which the law uttered against these sinners, has been inflicted on Christ; and, by this act, the whole demand of the Father was extinguished. The law has no farther claim. Justice has no farther claim. The whole amount of penal suffering has been endured by Jesus Christ in the character of a legal substitute. We ask, if such an atonement as this had been made, on what principle these persons would be released from future punishment? Must they

* This representation of the atonement is noticed by THOMAS ERSKINE, Esq. an acute and discriminating writer "On the Internal Evidence for the truth of Revealed Religion." Philadelphia edition, p. 95, 96. Speaking of the doctrine of the atonement, he remarks—"It has been sometimes so incautiously stated, as to give ground to cavillers for the charge that the christian scheme represents God's attribute of justice as utterly at variance with every moral principle. The allegation has assumed a form somewhat resembling this, that, according to christianity, God indeed apportions to every instance and degree of transgression its proper punishment; but that, while he rigidly exacts this punishment, he is not much concerned whether the person who pays it be the real criminal or an innocent being, provided only that it is a full equivalent; nay, that he is under a strange necessity to cancel guilt whenever this equivalent of punishment is tendered to him by whatever hand." This perversion has arisen from the habit among some writers on religion of pressing too far the analogy between a crime and a pecuniary debt."

beg of God to spare them from the curse of the law, and save them from going down to the prison of despair? This would be unnecessary, because it is the very vital principle of this scheme, that the whole penal demand has been answered. Jesus Christ is represented as having suffered the identical amount which their sins deserved, and as the law cannot punish twice for one and the same offence, they can sustain no liability to punishment. Shall they bless God, that their sins are pardoned by his rich and abounding grace? We ask, how can grace or pardon consist with such an atonement as we have just described? What grace or favour did you grant your debtor, when you released him from prison, after his surety had paid the demand?—None at all. You did only that which the law would compel you to do. You liberated the debtor when the whole amount was discharged. And if Christ has suffered that very penalty involved in the eternal condemnation of the elect, as some contend, then they ought to be liberated on the principles of law. Their debt is paid. The law has no farther demand; and grace and pardon are out of the question. There is but one being in the universe to whom these persons would be indebted for their release; and that is the friend who paid their debt, or suffered the penalty of the law in their stead.

A moment's reflection will teach us, that this is not the representation of the atonement given in the bible. Notwithstanding what Christ has done, in order to prepare the way for man's salvation, we are every where taught, that we are saved by grace, and that a free par-

don is consistent with full atonement. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ."* We need no other proof than this, that Christ did not pay the debt, or literally suffer the penalty of the law for his people. He merely prepared the way for our debt to be remitted—or in plain language, and without any metaphor, *for our sins to be forgiven.*

Fourthly. On the principle of a legal substitution and a literal infliction of the penalty of the law, the

* The objection against the scheme that Christ literally endured the penalty of the law in the room of his people, that it precludes the idea of grace in their restoration to the favour of God, is answered in something like the following manner by those who hold to this doctrine. The grace consisted in providing an atonement, and in Christ's suffering the punishment due to his people as sinners. The reward was due to Christ, and this reward is made over to his people by an act of grace.

The great objection against this theory is, that it does not correspond with the bible. The gift of Christ as Mediator, it is true, was an unspeakable gift; and the sufferings of Christ for men, were the effect of sovereign love; but all this does not save the sinner. The way is only prepared. The door is open. Mercy can now operate. But the sinner is still under condemnation: and if he is saved at all, he must be saved as much by an act of free grace as if no atonement had been made. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption, that is in Jesus Christ."—Rom. iii. 24. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."—Col. i. 14. Sinners, that is penitent and believing sinners, are "justified freely by his grace," and they receive "the forgiveness of sins" through the atonement. And these acts of acquittal and forgiveness, are subsequent to, and distinct from, the atonement itself.

atonement would bring no accession of happiness to the universe.

The system which is now under consideration represents the Lord Jesus Christ as undertaking to make an atonement for a definite number of our race. These persons are the elect, or those who will finally be saved. This atonement which he made for them, consisted in suffering the penalty of the law in their stead. It is not considered enough, on this plan, for him to suffer what would answer in the place of the infliction of the penalty; but he must suffer the identical curse which they deserved, and which they had incurred by their sins. The amount of Christ's sufferings must be just the same as the aggregate sufferings included in the eternal condemnation of all those who are saved by his merit.—There was first a literal transfer of all their sins to Christ, which rendered him legally bound to suffer their punishment, and then each and all of these sins were expiated by his enduring the original penalty which was threatened in the law. The agonies which he suffered were equal to the endless misery of all those who will be saved by his interposition in their behalf.

To this view of the atonement we farther object, because it annihilates every particle of benevolence in the gospel. If Christ suffered the same misery in kind and degree which was due to the whole number who will be saved, and which they must have suffered, had no atonement been made, we are unable to discover that wisdom and goodness which we have ever considered prominent features in the gospel scheme. We have been in the

habit of looking upon this system as the grand device of heaven for preventing misery and for increasing happiness. But if Christ suffered all that the law would inflict to eternity upon the vessels of mercy, then there is no gain on the principles of general benevolence. The same misery is endured, in the rational system, which would have been endured, had the whole race of Adam perished without the provisions of the gospel. Satan has met with no defeat. If he has not literally accomplished the ruin of the whole family of man, he has accomplished that which amounts to the same thing. He has secured a part as the victims of despair, and for those who are rescued from his grasp, he has received a full and malignant compensation. In the place of the eternal misery of each redeemed soul, he has seen the same amount of suffering inflicted on the Son of God.—This is by no means such a triumph over Satan as the bible describes. This is not such a gospel as inspiration reveals. A system which prevents no misery, and which brings no accession to the happiness of the universe—a system whose grand and distinctivè characteristic is that it devises a way in which the innocent may suffer a certain amount of misery which was due to the guilty, would hardly excite, as the gospel does, the wonder and admiration of the angels in heaven. Read the parable of the lost sheep, and you will learn, that the plan of redemption will increase, as it was designed to do, the happiness of the universe. Read almost any page of the New Testament, and you may infer the same truth which the apostle Paul distinctly expresses, in his Epistle to the Ephesians—that “the principalities and powers in heavenly places” learn “by the church the manifold wisdom of God.”

It may be objected to the general train of reasoning adopted in this discourse, and particularly to the argument distinctly stated under the present head, that it is not contended, that the penalty of the law was, in a strict and literal sense, inflicted on Christ. We reply, that we have met the doctrine as it is stated and defended by many. It is frequently proclaimed from the pulpit, and the sentiment may be found distinctly expressed in a great variety of publications both of ancient and modern date, that Christ sustained the exact amount of misery due to those who are to be saved by his blood. It is true, that men who have candidly examined the objections which are urged against this scheme, have, particularly of late, adopted a qualified mode of expression in relation to this point. They contend, that the real penalty of the law was inflicted on Christ; and, at the same time, acknowledge, that the sufferings of Christ were not the same, either in nature or degree, as those sufferings which were threatened against the transgressor. The words of our text are considered by many as furnishing unequivocal testimony to the fact, that Christ endured the penalty of the law in the room of his people. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." But it is, in no shape, asserted here, that Christ suffered the penalty of the law. The apostle tells us in what sense he was "made a curse for us." "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Believers are saved from the curse or penalty of the law by the consideration, that Christ was "made a curse" for them in another and a very different sense. He was "made a curse" in as much as he suffered, in order to open the door of hope to man, the

pains and ignominy of crucifixion. He hung upon a tree. He died as a malefactor. He died as one accursed. If this text proves that Christ suffered the penalty of the law, it does, at the same time, by the principles of legitimate exposition, prove, that the penalty of the law was crucifixion or hanging upon a tree. But the penalty of the law was eternal damnation, threatened against the transgressor alone, and liable to be executed upon him, and upon no one else.

As to the declaration, that Christ actually suffered the penalty of the law in the place of his people, and yet did not sustain, either in nature or degree, that misery which their sins deserved, it appears to us a contradiction in terms. The penalty of the law was something definite. It embraced sufferings of a certain kind, and it extended those sufferings to certain fixed and established limits. Now if, while Christ was suffering, he endured a misery essentially different, in its character, from that which was threatened in the penalty of the law, and if it differed no less in its quantity than its nature, how could it be, in any sense, an infliction of the threatened curse? The thing is impossible. If God had threatened to inflict a certain kind and a certain degree of penal evil upon the transgressor, can we say that this identical curse was executed because an innocent being sustained a different kind and a different degree of suffering? The position is utterly absurd.—How can we affirm, that it is the same penalty, when when we acknowledge, that both its character and quantity are different, and the subject upon whom it

is inflicted altogether an opposite one from that contemplated in the law itself?*

* There are but two theories respecting the nature of the atonement, which have any claim to self-consistency. One is, that Christ suffered in the most strict and literal sense the penalty of the law for his people, and the other, that his sufferings were a substitute for the penalty of the law which, if executed, would have been the measure of their punishment.

The first of these theories we have seen is utterly at war with the bible and common sense. And yet it is far more consistent with itself, than that mixed theory which many have been compelled of late to adopt in order to shield themselves from the arguments of their opponents. We mean that sentiment which declares that Christ suffered the penalty of the law for his people, and yet he did not suffer it in nature or degree. That is, he suffered something essentially different from the penalty, and yet this was the penalty itself!

In a sermon by Dr. Dana, of Londonderry, preached and printed since these sermons were written, we find this sentiment: "In as much as the scripture expressly declares that, in redeeming us from the law, he was made a curse for us, we are constrained to conclude, that his sufferings were a substantial execution of the law; a real endurance of the penalty, so far as the nature of the case admitted, or required." p. 8, 9. In another place he says, "We contend not that the Redeemer endured precisely the same misery in kind and degree to which the sinner was exposed."

The penalty of the law either *was* or was *not* inflicted on Christ. If it was inflicted, then it must have been inflicted in kind and degree. If not, then his sufferings were something specifically different from the penalty. To talk of "a real endurance of the penalty, so far as the nature of the case admitted, or required," is

TWO REFLECTIONS will close our present discourse

First. Incorrect views of the *nature* of the atonement, frequently lead to great errors in religion.

A denial of the doctrine of the atonement, is a funda-

to say that it was not "a REAL endurance of the penalty," because "the nature of the case" did not admit or require it.

But why is it necessary to support the position, that the curse of the law was inflicted on Christ? If it should be said, that the divine veracity was pledged to execute the law—we reply, that the divine veracity can find no support, in that kind of infliction of the curse which is here supposed. "A substantial execution of the law"—an "endurance of the penalty, so far as the nature of the case admitted, or required"—an infliction of suffering, not upon the transgressor, but upon a surety, when the law had not made the most distant allusion to a surety, certainly has much more the appearance of *evasion* than *execution* of the law. If both the nature and degree of sufferings involved in the penalty of the law, may be dispensed with, on the same principle, the penalty itself may be set aside, provided the glory of the law-giver and the happiness of the universe can be secured in some other way. The moment a man admits, that Christ did not suffer, in the most rigid sense, the penalty of the law—that his misery was not the same in nature and degree which the law had threatened—that he did not suffer the same punishment which would have been inflicted upon those who will finally be saved—and that the atonement was not, in every feature of it, a "quid pro quo" transaction—a transaction for value received—that moment he admits a principle which is utterly at war with the theory of legal substitution and infliction of penalty, and will never be able to make his system correspond each and every part with the rest till he adopts that view of the Mediation of Christ which we have endeavored to present in our next discourse.

mental error, and is commonly the first step towards the rejection of the bible as containing a revelation from God. The admission or denial of this cardinal sentiment, will give form and feature to our whole system of theological views. The same remark will apply, with some qualification, to the opinions which we entertain respecting the *nature* of the atonement. If, for instance, we adopt the sentiment of legal substitution, and say, that Christ literally sustained the penalty of the law in the room of a precise and definite number of our race, how perfectly easy and natural it is to adopt the deduction, that these persons are saved by an act of justice? Each and all of their sins, to the full extent of their demerit, have been punished in the person of a legal sponsor, and now the law has no farther demand. Indeed, in these circumstances, justice calls for their release, because her last claim has been extinguished. To punish these persons, would be an act of wanton injustice and cruelty. Whether such a sentiment as this, or a sentiment leading to such conclusions, is calculated to excite humility in the bosom of the sinner, let the candid judge.

But transitions, in theology, from one kindred error to another, are easy. And so it happens in the case now under consideration. This system, at least as it has been adopted by many, supposes an eternal union between Christ and those for whom he died. What he did, they themselves have performed. In consequence of this legal oneness, they are not only released from punishment by an act of law, but in Christ they are eternally justified. We have now arrived within the

limits of Antinomianism; than which, a sorer evil has rarely afflicted the church. A few lines more will finish the picture. Let it only be understood, that Christ has so obeyed the law in the place of his people, that they are released from legal obligation—and so suffered its penalty in their stead, that they are legally exempted from punishment; and you have presented before you the whole size and complexion and feature of that MONSTER who has *orthodoxy* inscribed upon his forehead, and carries a proud and unsanctified heart in his bosom! This is the enemy of God in the specious garb of peculiar zeal for his truth.

Secondly. We may learn from the preceding discussion, in what sense we are to understand Substitution and Imputation.

It may be said, that the positions taken in this discourse, involve a denial of both these doctrines. To this assertion we are by no means ready to subscribe.—The atonement was a substitute for the infliction of the penalty of the law—or the sufferings of Christ were a substitute for the punishment of sinners. In the case of all believers, and such and such only will be saved, the misery which Christ endured, is the real and only ground of their release, because without these sufferings, or the atonement, there could have been no pardon or grace for sinners. He suffered what was necessary to be endured, in order to bring rebels within the reach of mercy. Thus, in the administration of the divine government, the sufferings of Christ come in the place of the eternal condemnation of every ransomed

soul—that is, of every penitent and believing sinner.— This is vicarious suffering. It is the suffering of Christ in the place of the endless suffering of the sinner. If we understand the import of language, here is real substitution. “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him ; and with his stripes we are healed.”

As to imputation, we do deny that the sins of men, or of any part of our race, were so transferred to Christ, that they became his sins, or were so reckoned to him, that he sustained their legal responsibilities ; but this does not necessarily involve a denial of the doctrine.— Christ was treated as though he had been a sinner—and as his sufferings answered the purpose of the sinner’s punishment, and are the ground of his pardon, it may be said with respect to all believers, that their sins were imputed or reckoned to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed or reckoned to them. That is, Christ was treated as sinners deserved, and sinners are treated as Christ deserves. Or in other words, the sufferings of Christ form the basis of the sinner’s forgiveness. “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

SERMON III.

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT.



ROMANS iii. 26.—“*To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*”

FEW things have a more deep and extensive influence upon our religious opinions, than the ideas we entertain respecting the atonement made by Jesus Christ. Having on a former occasion endeavoured to establish the necessity of a propitiation for sin, we proceeded in our last discourse to a partial consideration of its nature. Two opinions, in relation to this branch of our subject, and which differ materially from each other, were then stated as having a claim upon our serious investigation.

One represents the Lord Jesus Christ as the legal substitute of the elect—as having suffered, in this character, the exact penalty of the law in their stead—and as having released them, on the principles of justice, from that curse which was pronounced upon them as transgressors. This representation of the nature of the atonement we considered inadmissible on the following grounds.

Such a satisfaction as is here defined would imply an exchange or transfer of moral character between Christ and those for whom he died. Christ could not be punished, on legal principles, till he was guilty in the eye of the law—and his people could not be justified by the principles of the law, till its penalty was literally inflicted. This transfer of character so as to render Jesus Christ the sinner, and the soul for whom he died, innocent, appears to us without foundation in reason or scripture. The same system would destroy all mercy in God the Father, in the salvation of sinners, because it represents God as totally disinclined to the exercise of compassion, till every jot and tittle of the legal curse was inflicted. On the same principle grace or pardon in the release of the sinner from future punishment would be out of the question—for what grace, or pardon, or favour, can there be in the discharge of a debtor whose demand has been cancelled to the “uttermost farthing?” And as to the benevolence of the gospel, we are utterly unable to discover how such a feature can consist with that idea of the atonement which represents Christ as having suffered the same quantity of penal evil which would have been embraced in the future condemnation of all those who will be redeemed by his sacrifice. What wisdom or benevolence can there be in a plan or expedient which shall inflict a certain degree of suffering upon the innocent who could never deserve it, in order to spare the guilty from precisely the same degree of suffering, and to which, too, their sins had justly exposed them?

The other opinion of the atonement which has been

stated, and which will now come under consideration, represents the Lord Jesus Christ as suffering, not the literal penalty of the law, but that which will fully vindicate the divine character and support the divine government, while God, at the same time, extends pardon and eternal life to the sinner. This, in our opinion, is the only correct and rational idea of the atonement, and the one presented by the Apostle in the text and the context.

He had just given us above, a description of the deplorable state of mankind as rebels against God; and after declaring unequivocally the impossibility of justification by the deeds of the law, he adverts to that scheme of restoration which is revealed in the gospel. This scheme was contrived for sinners. Justification is by grace, and yet this grace is expressed through an atonement. "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ." Whatever this price of redemption offered by Jesus Christ is, it certainly does not so answer the penal demands of the law, as to discharge the sinner, or to admit of his restoration to the favour of God on any other principle than that of grace alone. This "propitiation" God hath set forth, or exhibited to the universe, to declare his righteousness; "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The object of the atonement is here stated in explicit terms. It was required and made in order to open a consistent way for the publication of pardon, or for the exercise of grace to sinners. Its purpose was to declare the "righteousness" or moral rectitude and perfection of God in dispensing,

in this instance, with the literal execution of the penalty of the law, and in bestowing eternal life upon those who deserved to die. This satisfaction was required, that God might be "just"—just to himself as the moral governor, and just or faithful to the interests of the universe over which he presides, even in justifying and saving the believing sinner.

But a more clear and satisfactory illustration of this idea of the atonement, will be attempted in answer to the following inquiries. What were the feelings of God toward our fallen world, without respect to a propitiation? Why was not pardon absolute, without any connection with a sacrifice for sin? And how did the atonement made by Christ, prepare the way for the exercise of mercy to sinners?

First. What were the feelings of God toward our fallen world, without respect to a propitiation for sin?

The representation which has often been made of the divine character, as connected with the moral law and the doctrine of the atonement, we have often thought highly derogatory to the Godhead. The eternal Father is exhibited before us, as a being of unbending justice, and as determined, at all events, to maintain the honour of the law by inflicting the last particle of penal evil which it has denounced against the sinner. The mercy exhibited in the gospel, is considered an attribute or feeling altogether superinduced by the propitiatory sacrifice which was offered up by Jesus Christ. When all the suffering which was included in the penalty of

the law, had been endured by a substitute, then and not till then, is the compassion of God excited for perishing sinners. However it may appear to others, we frankly acknowledge, that this description poorly corresponds with that character of God which is delineated in the bible. All his attributes are independent of time and circumstance. The scriptures teach us, that God was inclined to mercy, in his treatment of our apostate world, irrespective of any atonement or satisfaction whatever. So far from being the effect or consequence, mercy is the exciting and efficient cause of that propitiation which was made in the person of Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."

God was not only inclined to exhibit the attribute of mercy, in our world, but he positively and irreversibly determined, in his own infinite mind, to unfold this perfection here below, and to rescue multitudes of our race from the curse of that law which they had violated.— This feeling of compassion, in Jehovah, was infinitely strong; this determination to save sinners, was settled and eternal. It is the deliberate purpose of God to set aside the penalty of the law, at least, so far as it respects the salvation of many sinners in our world. Mercy is to be displayed and glorified in the salvation of men; and the grand question now is, not what shall be done to excite the compassion of God for a ruined world; but in what way shall that eternal love which is in active operation, be expressed, so as to shield the sinner from the curse of the law, on the one hand, and to se-

cure the divine honour and integrity, on the other?—
But this leads us to our

Second Inquiry—Why was not pardon absolute, without any connection with a sacrifice for sin?

All the reasons which may have existed in the divine mind, in favour of an atonement, it would be bold and presumptuous for us to undertake to determine or explain. Some of these, according to our apprehension, were stated, in a former discourse, on the subject of the necessity of a propitiation for sin. Without treading upon the ground then occupied, we have a few considerations to suggest in answer to the inquiry which we have just stated above. The spirit of the inquiry is this.—If sinners are to be saved by grace, and by grace alone, why was not pardon or forgiveness directly and absolutely bestowed upon them, without the intervention or sufferings of a mediator? To the humble christian we might reply, that this was not the plan of salvation adopted by infinite wisdom—and this reply should be deemed sufficient. The bible has so informed us. If any are still disposed to push the inquiry, why pardon could not have been extended to the sinner without an atonement, we reply, that there was the same necessity for an atonement, as there originally was for the penalty of the moral law; or as there is, that this penalty should ordinarily be executed upon the transgressor.

The penalty of the moral law was intended to operate as a powerful motive to obedience—and the execution of this penalty, whenever it takes place in the universe,

becomes an awful warning to deter others from transgression. Now if the penalty of the law were never to be executed, its whole authority would be annihilated. It would become more feeble and inefficient, than if no penalty or threatening, had ever been annexed. If the order and happiness of the universe, under the moral government of God, require laws with suitable penal sanctions—and require, too, that these laws be executed; then it would seem, that, whenever pardon is to take the place of the penalty of the law, a substitute for the execution of the threatened curse, would be proper, in order to preserve the divine authority from aspersion, and to guard the throne of heaven from encroachment. Should it still be urged, that human governments frequently grant absolute pardons, or exempt the criminal from the legal penalty without any reference to a propitiation, we reply, that from the imperfection of human governments, this may sometimes be the best thing which can be done; but every interference with the direct operation of the law, weakens its authority, and gives countenance to crime. It is a well known fact, that in every country, offences abound in direct proportion to the difficulty of conviction, and the facility of pardon. In the moral government of God, which is the only perfect government in the universe, the penalty of the law is always equally important and necessary; and in case this penalty is to be set aside and not executed, in any particular instance, there is the same necessity that the moral governour should furnish a publick substitute for the infliction of the curse, as there was that the law should originally include a penal sanction. Our conclusion from this mode of reasoning

would be, that in the government of God, pardon could never be granted, except through the intervention of an atonement; that is, the penalty of the moral law would never be set aside without the adoption of those precautionary measures which would secure the order and prosperity of the universe, as effectually, to say the least, as the infliction of the penal curse itself could do.

Thirdly. How did the atonement made by Jesus Christ, prepare the way for the exercise of mercy to sinners?

That the object of the atonement was, not to pay our debt or to obliterate our guilt, but to prepare the way for a free pardon, and a gracious acceptance with God, appears from the whole drift of the Apostle's reasoning in the paragraph from which our text is selected.—Sinners are represented as being justified freely by grace, and yet this is effected through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. God required an atonement, that he might declare his "righteousness," or the moral propriety of his administration, in saving sinners—"that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"—that God might be both just and merciful.

This is the proper time to inquire in what sense the justice of God was satisfied by the atonement made by Jesus Christ. That very incorrect ideas are not unfrequently attached to this expression—ideas entirely different from those intended to be conveyed by the Apos-

tle, in our text, there can be but little doubt. The term justice is used in different senses. Its legal acceptance, or its use as connected with the operation of law, is twofold, which critical writers have distinguished by the epithets of commutative and distributive. Commutative justice, which may with equal propriety be styled pecuniary or commercial justice, is wholly confined to the regulation of property and the payment of debts.— It is hardly necessary to say, that this kind of justice can have nothing to do with a violation of the moral law, or with that atonement which has been made for sinners by Jesus Christ. And yet, plain as the case is, how many have been misled and bewildered by placing a literal construction upon the figurative language of the scriptures in relation to this transaction. The august business which involved the honour of the divine government, the death of the Son of God and the redemption of immortal man, is degraded to the level of a pecuniary transaction—is brought down to a mere matter of debt and credit. We repeat the declaration that commutative justice has nothing to do with the affair. If the blood of Christ, or the atonement is the *price* of our redemption, it is so only in a metaphorical sense, as furnishing a consistent ground for our free pardon and gracious acceptance.

Distributive justice respects the moral character and conduct of creatures, and consists in rewarding, or punishing them according to their merit, or their ill-desert. Now this kind of justice does respect the subject under consideration ; and much of the difficulty attending the atonement, may be settled at once, if we can determine

the question whether distributive justice was, or was not satisfied by the death of Christ. Many contend, that this is the fact. Man had broken the law of God—Christ became his substitute—stood in his place—and was punished to the full extent of the penalty of the law. In consequence of this vicarious sacrifice, man is acquitted by the law, because justice is satisfied, and there is no farther penal demand against him. This is the representation sometimes, and not unfrequently, given of the atonement. But can this statement of the affair be defended on the principles of distributive justice?—Certainly not. In the transaction under consideration neither Christ nor the sinner is treated according to his character, or according to the terms or principles of the moral law. Christ had perfectly and uniformly obeyed the law, and by this law he must be justified, and not condemned and punished. On the other hand, the sinner had violated the moral law, and this law could never acquit him. The death of Christ, in itself considered, had no influence upon the moral character of the sinner. He may, by the grace of God, be rescued and saved through this death, but in the eye of the law he is still a sinner and deserves to be punished. The law knows nothing of punishing the innocent and acquitting the guilty. The principles of distributive justice sternly forbid it. The idea of such a substitution and imputation, as would render Christ guilty and the sinner holy, has been considered on a former occasion—and may with safety be pronounced unworthy of a place in a system of enlightened theology. We conclude, then, that distributive justice, or justice in its common and appropriate sense, in relation to rewards and punishments,

was not satisfied by the atonement made by Jesus Christ. The moral law, when violated, has but one demand, and that demand is the death of the transgressor. But in the gospel, of which the atonement is an essential part, the principles of distributive justice are overruled or set aside. The innocent and meritorious suffers, and the guilty is screened from punishment. This is a sovereign act of God as the moral governour. Should it be again asked—if the arm of distributive justice can be arrested, and is to be arrested—and the law that threatened, in this instance, is not to inflict the curse—why was not this sovereign and special interposition so managed as not to involve the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ? We recur to the doctrine which we have before advanced and defended—that the penalty of the law is essential to the existence and happiness of a moral government; and the only method in which the execution of this penalty can be suspended, is to furnish an adequate, and practical, and publick substitute in its place. The ends or objects of distributive justice must be secured. And this substitute by which these ends or objects are effectually accomplished, is to be found in that atonement which is revealed in the gospel.

But there is a third sense in which the term justice is frequently used, and the consideration of which will lead us directly to the nature of that satisfaction which Jesus Christ has made for sinners—we mean what is commonly denominated general or public justice. In this acceptation, it has no direct reference to law, but embraces those principles of virtue or benevolence by which we are bound to govern our conduct; and by which God

himself governs the universe. It is in this sense that the terms *δικαιον*, "just," and *δικαιοσύνης*, "righteousness," occur in our text. These terms are precisely of the same import, except one is a substantive and the other an adjective; and in this connection they stand directly related to the atonement. The apostle teaches us, that God required a propitiation for sin, that he might declare his righteousness or justice; that he might be righteous or just, and "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Now we conceive, that this passage, thus explained, throws much light upon the nature of that satisfaction which Christ has rendered to the justice of God. This atonement was required, that God might be "just," or righteous, that is, that he might do the thing which was fit and proper, and best and most expedient to be done; and, at the same time, be perfectly at liberty to justify "him which believeth in Jesus." The legal obstacle to man's salvation was removed by the sacrifice of Christ.

The whole doctrine of the atonement, so far at least as its nature is concerned, can now be placed before you in a few words. Commutative justice was not satisfied by the atonement, because the whole transaction was of a moral and not of a commercial character. Distributive justice was not satisfied by this transaction, because the innocent suffered, in order to open a way for the pardon of the guilty. The penalty of the law, strictly speaking, was not inflicted at all; for this penalty in which was embodied the principles of distributive justice, required the death of the sinner, and did not require the death of Christ. As a substitute for the in-

fliction of this penalty, God did accept of the sufferings of his Son. The relation of the sinner to the curse which this law pronounces against the transgressor, is just the same which it was without an atonement. He is the same guilty creature that he was before satisfaction was made. The law has the same demand upon him, and utters the same denunciation of wrath against him. The law, or justice, that is distributive justice, as expressed in the law, has received no satisfaction at all.—The whole legal system has been suspended, at least, for the present, in order to make way for the operation of one of a different character. In introducing this system of mercy, which involves a suspension of the penal curse, God has required a satisfaction to the principles of general or publick justice—a satisfaction which will effectually secure all the good to the universe which is intended to be accomplished by the penalty of the law when inflicted, and, at the same time, prevent all that practical mischief which would result from arresting the hand of punitive justice without the intervention of an atonement. God can now be “just”—that is, he can secure his own honour as the lawgiver, and promote the best interests of his universal empire, and, at the same time, stay the curse of the violated law, and extend pardon to the chief of sinners. This was the great desideratum in order to bring consolation to a dying world. This could not have been done without the atonement of Christ; for “without shedding of blood is no remission.”*

* The author of these discourses is happy to be able to illustrate and establish the positions here assumed by as respectable human authority as that of the late Dr. Dwight.

A FEW REFLECTIONS will close our discourse.

First. If the views which we have stated of the nature of the atonement be correct, then the demands of the law upon the sinner, remain unimpaired and undiminished.

This declaration is true, as it respects both the precept and the penalty. And yet there is a strong tendency in almost every human heart, to feel a kind of security from the consideration that Christ has died for sinners. The fact, that he expired upon the cross in order

“Christ in his sufferings and death made a complete atonement for the sins of mankind. In other words, he rendered to the law, character, and government, of God, such peculiar honour, as to make it consistent with their unchangeable nature and glory, that sinners should, on the proper conditions, be FORGIVEN. But the atonement inferred no obligation of justice, on the part of God, to forgive them. They were still sinners, after the atonement, in the same sense, and in the same degree, as before. In no degree were they less guilty, or less deserving of punishment.

“The supposition, incautiously admitted by some divines, that Christ satisfied the demands of the law by his active and passive obedience, in the same manner as the payment of a debt satisfies the demands of a creditor, has, if I mistake not, been heretofore proved to be unfounded in the scriptures. We owed God our obedience, and not our property; and obedience in its own nature is due from the subject himself, and can never be rendered by another. In refusing to render it we are criminal; and for this criminality merit punishment. The guilt, thus incurred, is inherent in the criminal himself, and cannot in the nature of things be transferred to another. All that, in this case, can be done by a substitute, of whatever character, is to render it not improper for the

to open the door of mercy to a ruined world, ought, no doubt, to be the cause of ardent and eternal gratitude. But upon this fact the unbeliever has no right to build his hope. As we are liable to receive incorrect impressions of the atonement, and to derive from it a security which it was never intended in itself to inspire—let us examine, for a moment, the condition of man notwithstanding the sacrifice offered by Jesus Christ upon Calvary! What is there in this sacrifice which has impaired the demands of the law upon the sinner?—Whether we consider the obedience of Christ to the preceptive requirement, or his death as a substitute for its penalty, we can find nothing which repeals the original injunction, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Now

lawgiver to pardon the transgressor. No substitute can, by any possible effort, make him cease to be guilty, or to deserve punishment. This (and I intend to say it with becoming reverence) is beyond the ability of Omnipotence itself. The fact, that he is guilty, is past; and can never be recalled.

“Thus it is evident, that the sinner, when he comes before God, comes in the character of a sinner only; and must, if strict justice be done, be therefore condemned. If he escape condemnation, then, he can derive these blessings from mere mercy only, and in no degree from justice. In other words, every blessing which he receives, is a free gift. The pardon of his sins, his acquittal from condemnation, and his admission to the enjoyments of heaven, are all given to him freely, and graciously, because God regards him with infinite compassion, and is therefore pleased to communicate to him these unspeakable favours.”

See Dwight's Works, vol. 2, Sermon 64.

this precept stands, and will forever stand, just as it would if no atonement had ever been made.

But we are still more liable to ascribe to the atonement an influence over the penalty of the law which it never possessed, and which, in accordance with the principles of a moral government, it never could possess. There is a secret and perpetual recurrence to the idea that Christ has paid the demand, or suffered the penalty of the law, so that its claims are now quieted and the sentence of condemnation repealed. But this is a fundamental, and may prove a fatal error. There is nothing in the character of Christ's sufferings which can affect or modify the penalty of the law. These sufferings were not legal. They constituted no part of that curse which was threatened against the transgressor; neither do they insure, in a single instance, aside from the stipulations of the covenant of redemption, the repeal of that curse as it respects the sinner. His moral character is just what it would have been, if no atonement had ever been made. He is just as much the slave of sin and the heir of death now, as he would have been, if Christ had never expired. All that the atonement has effected for the sinner, is to place him within the reach of pardon—to make it consistent with the perfections of God to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. But the unbeliever, continuing such, must perish. Even the blood of Christ cannot save him while under the damning sin of unbelief.

Secondly. The sentiments advanced and supported in the preceding discourse, will enable us to reconcile *full atonement with free grace.*

The opposers of the doctrine of the atonement, have often objected to what they consider a palpable absurdity in that system which teaches, that God first required an ample satisfaction for sin, and then claims the honour of bestowing a free and unmerited pardon upon the penitent and believing transgressor. They say, that this doctrine represents God as executing the whole penalty of the law upon a substitute, till justice is satisfied—till the law has no farther demand, and then taking to himself the credit of releasing those from punishment, on the principles of grace, whom the law could not, in these circumstances, justly condemn.*

* On this point hear Dr. Priestly, the great champion of Socinianism. The following is his objection to the doctrine of the atonement.

“ We read in the scriptures, that we are justified freely by the grace of God. But what free grace, or mercy, does there appear to have been in God, if Christ gave a full price for our justification, and bore the infinite weight of divine wrath on our account? We are commanded to forgive others, as we ourselves hope to be forgiven; and to be merciful as our Father, who is in heaven, is merciful. But surely we are not thereby authorized to insist upon any atonement or satisfaction, before we give up our resentments towards an offending penitent brother. Indeed, how could it deserve the name of forgiveness if we did? It is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of satisfaction for sin by the death of Christ, with the doctrine of free grace, which, according to the universal tenour of the scriptures, is so fully displayed in the pardon of sin, and the justification of sinners. It is only from the literal interpretation of a few figurative expressions in the scriptures, that this doctrine of atonement, as well as that of transubstantiation, has been derived; and it is certainly a doctrine highly injurious to God; and if we who are commanded to imitate God, should act

Now we cheerfully confess, that this objection would be valid, if the atonement were to be considered as a satisfaction to commutative justice, or in the nature of the payment of a debt. In this case to cancel the demand, is to annihilate every thing like grace or favour in the discharge. The objection, that there would be

upon the maxims of it, it would be subversive of the most amiable part of virtue in men. We should be implacable and unmerciful, insisting upon the uttermost farthing."

Thus far the Doctor. It needs but little discernment to see, that the objections here urged, have no application to the doctrine of the atonement as it has been stated and defended in these Discourses. They fail of their mark, and utterly fall to the ground. They apply exclusively to that system which represents the atonement under the literal notion of repairing damages, or paying a debt; and this view of the subject we utterly disclaim. If the legal demand against the sinner was literally and fully cancelled by Christ, then we confess, that there would be no grace in his subsequent justification. Forgiveness could have no place in the gospel scheme.

But if we consider the atonement as required by the moral governour, not for the purpose of taking away the demerit of sin, but for the purpose of rendering the pardon of sin admissible—if we look upon this great transaction as intended, not to incline God to the feelings or exercise of mercy, but as intended to save his authority and government from prostration, and this compassion from becoming a real curse to the universe—if we consider the blood of Christ, not as extinguishing the sinner's individual debt, but as rendering such a satisfaction to the *general* or *publick* justice of God as would make him "a terrour to evil doers" while he forgives and saves the guilty—then the charge of Dr. Priestley, that "it is impossible to reconcile the doctrine of satisfaction for sin by the death of Christ, with the doctrine of free grace," and

no grace in the sinner's release, would be equally well founded if the atonement had rendered full and literal satisfaction to the claims of distributive justice. If the penalty of the law was once inflicted, what more could that law demand? It has but one penalty. If Christ suffered precisely what the law had threatened against an individual sinner, then it would be wrong to inflict the same punishment upon that sinner. And if it would be wrong to punish him, then there must be an obliga-

his insinuation, that an atonement represents God as "implacable and unmerciful, insisting upon the uttermost farthing," is inadmissible, and totally unfounded in matter of fact! The atonement we hold, is in every sense, consistent with free grace.

The Doctor's parallel between our forgiveness of God, and our duty to forgive one another, is more plausible than solid. His argument, when stripped of its imposing drapery, is this, we are required to forgive one another without an atonement, and therefore God must have forgiven sinners without an atonement. This reasoning contains, as we shall be able so show, two fundamental errors.

The *first* error is this: there is no distinction here made between a publick and a private character; between God as the moral governour of the universe, and man in his individual moral capacity. The atonement was not required in order to produce a change in the divine feelings, but it was required in order to remove difficulties of a publick nature which stood in the way of the sinner's pardon. And a civil governour, or any other man who sustains publick responsibilities, may act in the same way, and not subject himself to the charge of being "implacable and unmerciful, and insisting upon the uttermost farthing." A criminal, for instance, may receive a real pardon, and yet this pardon may be founded on some consideration which, in this instance, will

tion on the part of God to release him ; and, in this case, there could be no grace in his discharge, or exemption from punishment. Pardon or forgiveness, supposes that the creature is guilty, and that the law might justly punish him.

But when we consider, that the atonement includes no such satisfaction as is here contemplated, the objection will vanish. The atonement paid no debt—it involved the infliction of no penalty. It was a substitute for the curse which was due to the sinner ; it merely prepared the way for the proclamation of mercy to

sustain the government in this act of mercy :—And, aside from this consideration, clemency might have been a crime rather than a duty.

But the *second* error is greater than the first. It consists in confounding the atonement with the legal punishment which the crime deserved. Such a satisfaction, and forgiveness could not co-exist. But this point has been thoroughly discussed already.

As to the insinuation, that the doctrine of the atonement, and of transubstantiation rest upon the same basis, it more resembles the sneer of the infidel, than the declaration of a candid christian.—There is a disingenuousness in this remark, which we have rarely witnessed in any man who was not either grossly ignorant, or essentially wanting in self-respect. As to transubstantiation, it is well known to rest upon the literal construction of a single figurative expression ; while the atonement is a web running through the whole of the Old and the New Testament scriptures. The whole typical economy of Moses—and every page of the gospel, point directly to this important doctrine. So much for the candour of a man who places all religion in liberality of sentiment !

rebels, and the extension of actual pardon to every believer in Christ Jesus.

With this idea of atonement, free grace is perfectly consistent. If the debt were paid, or the penalty of the law exhausted, then the sinner's release would be by law, and not by grace. But if the atonement merely rendered pardon compatible with the glory of God and the publick good—if it did not require, but merely permitted God to extend forgiveness to sinners—then full atonement and free grace may go hand in hand. And thus it is represented in the scriptures. “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace.” The price of redemption was the blood of Christ; but this merely opened the channels into which are poured the rich and abundant and sovereign grace of God.

Thirdly. The view which we have now taken of the nature of the atonement, settles the question respecting its EXTENT.

A full discussion of this topick will be reserved for a future occasion. At present we shall barely glance at it as connected with the preceding discourse. The whole question respecting a limited or general atonement, is settled by the notions which we entertain of its intrinsick nature. If the atonement consisted in Christ's suffering the exact amount of misery due to all those who will be saved—if it were a transaction regulated by the principles of commercial justice, then we might with propriety talk of its being limited to the elect.—

In this case the sufferings of the mediator must have been measured out according to the number to be saved. But if the atonement consist, not in cancelling the demand for *one* man or *all* men, but in opening the door of hope—in rendering the pardon of sinners consistent with the character, law and universe of God—then the question of extent is settled at once. There can be no limitation in the case; for the same sufferings which would vindicate the divine character in offering or extending salvation to *one*, would equally vindicate the divine character in offering or extending salvation to *many*—leaving, as this system does, the disposal of pardon and eternal life at the sovereign option of Jehovah.—This does away the common objection against a general provision, that there is a loss to the universe, if Christ died for *all*, and a *part* only shall be saved. This objection goes upon the supposition, that the atonement is the payment of a debt; and if the debt was paid for all, and a part only shall be released—then there was a loss of treasure or a sacrifice of funds. This representation of the case we have already proved to be inadmissible.

And thus the system of the gospel every where either explicitly or virtually acknowledges the general character of the atonement. The invitations of the gospel are to all; the bible every where testifies, that there is provision enough and to spare; sinners are blamed and upbraided for rejecting the atonement; a more aggravated condemnation is represented as awaiting those who perish under the gospel, than those who perish under the simple operation of the law; and unbelief, and not

the limitation of the atonement, is every where, in the inspired volume, declared to be the cause why sinners die. May God grant, that none of us may be found despisers of this great salvation. AMEN.

SERMON IV.

THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT.



I. JOHN ii. 2.—“*And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*”

HAVING on former occasions considered the necessity and the nature of the atonement, we shall proceed in the present discourse to an examination of its *extent*. Two opinions have prevailed, and do still prevail, in the christian church, in relation to this important point; and it shall be our aim, in the discussion now before us, to ascertain, if possible, the real state of the case as revealed in the oracles of eternal truth. Before we proceed to the merits of the question, it is proper to have a clear and distinct apprehension of its import.—The point now to be settled is, whether Christ died to make an atonement for the sins of *the elect alone*, or whether his sacrifice is *general*, opening the door of mercy to our sinful race.

It is readily perceived, that the ideas which were advanced, in our last discourse, in relation to the nature of this satisfaction, must have an intimate connec-

tion with this point. If the atonement is to be considered as the literal payment of a debt, or, in other words, if it consisted in suffering the exact penalty of the law in the room of those who will be saved, it is manifest, that it must be limited in its extent. In this case it would be a provision which must be regulated according to the principles of commutative justice. If *one* soul were to be saved by the atonement, Christ must sustain an amount of suffering equal to that involved in the eternal condemnation of that one soul; and if a *thousand* were to be saved, Christ must suffer a thousand times that amount, and in the same proportion for any number who are to be rescued from perdition and exalted to glory. To this scheme we have insurmountable objections. Some of these have been already suggested, and others will be stated in the progress of the present discourse. Such a view of the sufferings of Christ, apportioning them exactly and definitely to the number of those who will be saved, is nowhere even hinted at in the bible. Neither do we believe, that Christ could have atoned for the sins of men in this sense; for notwithstanding his divinity, his human nature was alone susceptible of suffering. Now as a single sin deserved eternal misery, which certainly implies infinite suffering—we cannot see how every sin of all the redeemed could have been expiated, in a few short hours, by the agonies endured by the human nature of Christ, though this nature was united to the Godhead. We say, that Christ himself could not have made an adequate atonement—if this atonement implied, that he must endure sufferings equal to the eternal damnation of all those who will finally be saved.

On the other hand; if the atonement consisted, as we have endeavoured to prove, in the infliction of such sufferings upon the Lord Jesus Christ as would amply vindicate the divine character, and sustain the government of God, in the salvation of sinners—then an atonement sufficient for one, would be an atonement sufficient for all. If, in one word, this atonement merely opened the door of mercy—if it prepared the way for the offer and the exercise of pardon, then it must go upon the broad ground; and limitation is out of the question.

But we have another kind of testimony in favour of a general atonement, which it is our object to exhibit on the present occasion; testimony which the plainest christian can comprehend, which is either drawn from the express declarations of the scriptures, or founded upon the obvious and acknowledged principles of the gospel. That the atonement made by Jesus Christ is general in its character, appears to us fully established by the following considerations.

First. The invitations or offers of the gospel, are made indiscriminately to all.

This declaration, it is presumed, will not be denied by those who are well acquainted with their bibles.—Such passages as these speak the largeness and freedom of the gospel call. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.”—“Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”—“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The declaration, made to those who were invited in the parable, was, “Be-

hold, I have prepared my dinner ; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready ; come unto the marriage." And those who are thus invited to come and partake of the entertainment already prepared for them, are the identical persons who "made light of it, and went their ways," and were eventually destroyed for their contempt and rejection of the call. This was a practical illustration of the principle which is stated at the close of the parable—"Many are called, but few are chosen." That is, many are invited to the gospel feast who never come—many enjoy the free and gracious offer of all those blessings which are connected with the atonement, but continuing to reject this offer, they give evidence that they belong not to the number of God's chosen and peculiar people.

In support of the declaration, that the invitations of the gospel are made to all, we might transcribe page after page of the bible. Upon this fact depends the whole business of preaching the gospel. "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—"The spirit and the bride say, come. And let him that heareth say, come. And let him that is athirst, come : And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

But it is granted by many, that the calls of the gospel are made indiscriminately to sinners, and yet it is contended that the atonement is limited to a definite number in its extent. A few plain questions, may place this business at rest. Upon what are the calls and invitations of the gospel founded ? The answer is, upon the atonement—for if this atonement had never been made by

Jesus Christ, there could have been no offer of mercy to apostate man. The atonement is the foundation and the offer is the superstructure ; and we may with propriety ask, on what principle the latter can be greater than the former. We propose another question. Are sinners under obligations to hear and obey the gospel call ? We mean are *all* men under obligations to hear and obey ? If not, there is no sin committed in rejecting Christ and his salvation. But if all who hear the declarations of mercy as stated in the gospel, are under obligations to look to Christ for salvation ; to repent, and believe the gospel ; to come to the marriage feast—then one of two things must be true. There must be a general provision made for them in the atonement, or some are under obligations to do that which would be of no avail to them even in case of their compliance. They are commanded, and are under obligations to look to Jesus Christ for salvation, and yet Jesus Christ never lived or died to open the door for their recovery—they are commanded, and are under obligations to repent, and believe the gospel, when, at the same time, this gospel has made no preparation for their return to God—they are commanded, and are under obligations to come, and partake of the marriage feast, when in all the munificence of this entertainment there is not one particle of provision made for them. We hesitate not to say, that, in these cases, moral obligation cannot exist ; and, upon these principles, moral obligation can never be enforced. This is rearing a structure without a foundation, or a corner stone. But

Secondly. Sinners are expressly upbraided and con-

demned for not complying with the gospel offer, or for not becoming interested in the atonement made by Jesus Christ.

“This is the condemnation,” says our Saviour, “that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” On another occasion, “began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.” Of the stubborn and unbelieving Jews he complained in these terms, “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.” Should it be said, in relation to these passages, that they rather reprove men for resisting the miracles and instructions of Christ, than for rejecting the atonement, we reply, that the miracles and instructions of Christ, were the means of benefit and salvation to sinners only as they were connected with the sacrifice which he offered for their redemption; and the rejection of the one, implied the rejection of the other.

But that sinners are under obligations to embrace the gospel, and are guilty in the sight of God for rejecting its provisions—may be established beyond the possibility of evasion, from the parable of the marriage feast.—Certain persons were invited to this entertainment upon the strength of the provision which was in readiness; and they made light of it and would not come. For this act they were not only blamed, but condemned and punished. “When the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city.” In the parallel

parable, in another Evangelist, it is said, "None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." It is a given point, that these men who refused to come to the feast, represent those who finally perish. Now the question is, was there, or ~~was~~ there not an atonement, or provision made for these persons in the gospel of Christ? Those who hold to a limited atonement say that there was not—but to us it appears abundantly evident, from the parable, that there was. It is so asserted in the invitation. "All things are ready; come unto the marriage." And again, "Come, for all things are now ready." If it be a fact, that the atonement is limited to that particular number who will come to the gospel feast and be saved, then this invitation was not founded in truth. For these persons, there was nothing ready; for them there was no provision made. The punishment too inflicted upon these persons tells us, that there was an entertainment made for them—or in other words, provision for their salvation. Why were they doomed never to taste of the supper, and why were they given up to the devastations of fire and sword? It was because they refused to come and partake of a certain feast which they were assured was provided for them. Now if there was no such provision in this feast, then they are condemned and punished for rejecting and despising that which never existed in relation to themselves.—They are condemned and punished for not partaking of an entertainment which was made for others, and not for them. Such a representation as this—we speak it with reverence—is a libel upon the character of Jehovah! The argument drawn from this parable in favour of a general atonement, appears to us as clear as the light of

meridian day—the conclusion, is incontrovertible as the positions of eternal truth.

Thirdly. Rejecters of the gospel, are represented as more miserable in the future world, than those who have sinned only against the law.

If this declaration be true, it speaks loud in favour of a general atonement. Our inquiry will first respect the fact, and then its application to the point in hand.

That the despisers of Jesus Christ and his salvation will perish, with an aggravated destruction—a destruction enhanced by the consideration that they have had a price put into their hands to get wisdom, but have had no heart to improve it—is manifest from the whole tenour of the gospel. This sentiment is implied in several of the scriptures which have been quoted under the former heads of the present discourse. It is strongly intimated in the parable of the supper; and is more directly and distinctly taught in other parts of the bible. Of Capernaum our Saviour declared, “I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee.”—“But those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.”—“Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.”—“He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an

unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace ?”

Now it may be asked, why the doom of Capernaum will be more intolerable in the day of judgment, than that of Sodom—unless it is, because Capernaum was favoured with gospel privileges which Sodom never enjoyed—privileges which ought to have made her better—privileges which she was bound to improve to her salvation ? But what is the gospel without the atonement ? If Capernaum was more guilty, and will be ultimately more miserable, for rejecting the gospel, than those are, or can be, who are not chargeable with this act—then Capernaum was under obligations to embrace Christ, and be saved by his merits ; and if under obligations to embrace Christ and be saved by his merits, then the atonement must have been offered to Capernaum on the same terms upon which it is offered to others. To suppose that God would offer that to his creatures which has no existence—and then punish them for not embracing it—is to charge him with insincerity and empty show. Why will the enemies of Christ be brought forth, in the day of judgment, and be slain before him ? The crime alleged against them, and for which they are especially punished, is an unwillingness to submit to his mediatorial reign ; that is, an unwillingness to embrace the atonement and welcome his salvation. Does not this imply, that the atonement might have reached their case ? Why will it be said to some, hereafter, “ Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish ”—unless it is, that an atonement has actually been offered to them, and that this atonement which was offered as an

adequate ground for their personal and identical salvation, was a reality and not a deception? Why does a "sorer punishment" await the despiser of the gospel, than the transgressor of the law? It is because he has "trodden under foot the Son of God." He was under obligations to receive him as the atoning victim—as the propitiation for sin—as the all-sufficient Saviour. For not doing this, he is now condemned; and if this sentence of condemnation is just, then Christ was offered to him before he could be trodden under foot; and he must have made an atonement for this very character before he could be sincerely offered. To deny these conclusions, is to set scripture, and logick, and common sense at defiance.

Fourthly. Unbelief and not a limitation of the atonement, is every where represented as the reason why sinners perish.

Here it may be proper to call to mind the representations which we have before given of the nature of that propitiation made by Jesus Christ. The atonement does not of itself save a single soul. It barely opens the door for the accomplishment of this object by free and sovereign grace. "By grace are ye saved through faith." Hence the importance attached to faith in the scheme of salvation revealed in the gospel. It is by this exercise, that we receive the atonement, and rest upon it for justification and eternal life. "He that believeth"—not he that is atoned for, "shall be saved,"—and "he that believeth not"—not he that has no atonement made for him, "shall be damned." Now this scheme lays the

blame of the sinner's condemnation, where it ought to lie, upon his unbelief, and not upon the plan of God.— And so it is every where represented in the gospel. “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Why are sinners condemned under the operation of the gospel of Christ? It is because they have “not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” It is not, in any sense, to be ascribed to a deficiency in the atonement. But in order to agree with the limited scheme, the declaration ought to read, the non-elect or reprobates are “condemned already,” and must finally perish, because they have no provision made for them in the atonement of “the only begotten Son of God.” But we have not so learned the gospel of Christ. Take one declaration more of the same character. “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” Some of these Jews whom Christ addressed, would finally perish—not because his blood could not avail in their behalf, but because they would continue to reject this only way of reconciliation appointed by the Father.

And in the day of judgment, the rejection, and not the want of the atonement, will be the ground upon which the final and decisive sentence will be passed. At least this will be the case so far as men have enjoyed the light, and received the instructions of the gospel. Under the operation of that scheme of eternal love introduced by Jesus Christ, unbelief, and unbelief alone, closes the gates of heaven, and opens the door of the eternal pit, and rivets the chains of reprobation fast upon the soul of the sinner.

Fifthly. The scriptures expressly declare, that the atonement is general in its character.

Our text is directly in point. "He is the propitiation for our sins"—that is for the sins of the children of God, or actual believers—"and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." We are well aware that the phrase, "whole world," is by some limited to the elect. But this appears to us a departure from the just and obvious principles of biblical exposition. "The world," or what is still more expressive, "the whole world," is here contrasted with the church, or the collective body of believers; and in this connection it can mean nothing else than the whole body of unbelievers—without any reference to election in any possible shape. We say the contrast here is between believers and unbelievers, and not between believers and the elect. The import of the declaration is this:—Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of believers; and not only so, but for the sins of all unbelievers too.

When John the Baptist pointed his inquiring countrymen to Jesus Christ, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." It is easy to say, as in the former case, that the term "world" here means the elect; but this is mere assertion, and is unsupported by the bible. It is a correct principle of exposition, that a term should be taken in its ordinary and most simple acceptance, unless the context, or some unequivocal declaration of the spirit of God elsewhere recorded, may render a different construction necessary. Had John the Baptist intended to teach the doctrine of a limited atonement, he would probably have pointed to

the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the church or of his chosen people.

The apostle Paul, in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, assumes the doctrine of a general atonement as a given point ; and, from the universality of the propitiation, argues the universality of human depravity. “ Because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.” A remark or two will give this passage an important bearing upon the point in hand. Let it be asked, who are the subjects of spiritual death ? The answer must be, all mankind. If we push the inquiry one step farther, and ask, for whom did Christ die ? The answer must be, according to this passage, for all those who are the subjects of spiritual death ; that is for all mankind. “ If one died for all, then were all dead.” And the proposition is equally true, though stated in a different order. If all mankind were dead in tresspasses and sins, then Jesus Christ died for them all.

In his first Epistle to Timothy this same apostle tells us, that Christ “ gave himself a ransom for all.” This declaration, if critically examined, will furnish a conclusive argument in favour of a general atonement. (See 1. Tim. ii. 1—6.) The apostle exhorts, that supplications, &c. “ be made for all men : for kings, and for all that are in authority.” He urges this duty of praying for all men upon two different grounds—the benevolence of God who is willing that all men should be saved, and the atonement made by Christ who gave himself a ransom for all. Now we are here directed to pray “ for all men”—that is, for all mankind. This, we pre-

sume, will not be denied. And is it not equally true, that God is willing that all men who are the subjects of these supplications, should be saved? Or does he command all men to believe and be saved, and, at the same time, is unwilling that some should obey his own express injunction? And if christians are to pray for all men, and God is willing that all men should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved, do not these supplications of the christian, and this benevolent feeling of God toward the salvation of all men, grow out of the ransom which Christ has offered "for all"? If we limit the term "all," in this last case, to the elect, then the apostle's argument will stand thus. Christ gave himself a ransom for all the elect, and consequently God is willing that all the elect should be saved; and, therefore, christians ought to pray for all mankind. This reasoning does not hold together. The proper conclusion from these premises, thus gratuitously assumed, would be, that we ought to pray only for the elect; for the same reason which would lead us to restrict the term "all," in two instances, would lead us to restrict it in the third. If the apostle reasons correctly in this passage, he does insist upon the propriety of praying for all mankind from the universal benevolence of God, and the universality of the ransom offered by Jesus Christ.

We are conducted to the same conclusion by another verse of this paragraph. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The mediatorial work of Christ is here represented as carried on between "God and men." These

are the parties. . God stands upon one side of the great question which Christ has undertaken to bring to issue, and “men”—that is mankind, or the human race upon the other. In prosecuting his work as mediator, he has given “himself a ransom” to one of these parties for the other ; that is, a ransom to God for men—for *all* men—for the offending race without exception. There is “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ; who gave himself a ransom for all.” The connection between ἀνθρώπων, *men*, in the fifth verse, and πάντων, *all*, in the sixth verse, justifies the construction which we have given above. The ransom was given for that whole offending party between whom and God, the work of mediation was conducted by Jesus Christ.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the apostle tells us, that Jesus Christ “was made a little lower than the angels—that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” The expression “was made a little lower than the angels”—is only a circumlocution employed to assert the fact, that Christ became man ; and the apostle was led to adopt this phraseology from what he had said of the original condition of the human race, in the context. He became man, that he might taste death for man—“for every man”—for mankind without distinction. He became himself partaker of human nature, “that he by the grace of God should taste death, ὑπὲρ πάντων”—for each and every part of human nature.

The apostle Peter speaks of certain false teachers who would “bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves

swift destruction." Who these teachers are, it is not necessary to our present argument to determine. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that they perish, and are, at the same time, persons who were bought with the blood of Christ. This passage furnishes perfect demonstration, that the atonement made by Christ and the actual redemption of sinners are not commensurate, or of equal extent. Some are "bought" by the Lord himself, who, for their adherence to sin, are overwhelmed with "swift destruction." They were atoned for, and yet are lost. An attempt has been made to set aside this conclusion by denying, that there is any reference here to the atonement which has been made for sinners. It is asserted that the word *δὲς πρίην*, which is here translated Lord, is never applied to Jesus Christ in the bible. But this is not altogether certain. In Rev. 6. 10. the same word is applied either to the Father or the Son; and Macknight is inclined to favour the opinion, that it is applied to the latter. Be this, however, as it may, it can have but little influence upon the present question. The word may be employed to denote the Son with the same propriety with which it is employed to denote the Father; and were the passage quoted from Peter the only one in which it was used to designate the Lord Jesus Christ, this fact would by no means invalidate the argument. As it is a word applicable to the Godhead, the context must determine which Person it is intended, in any particular instance, to denote. Jesus Christ is the Lord or Master to whom these "false teachers" professed subjection; and he is that being who has "bought" sinners with his blood. And some who were thus bought; will inherit destruction.

We mention but one passage more in favour of general atonement. It is the declaration of Christ himself.—“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The advocates of limited atonement, have had great trouble with this text. As usual, “the world” here must signify the elect. To say nothing of this arbitrary and unnatural construction, this reading will not very well agree with what immediately follows. “God so loved the”—ELECT, (that is those who will finally believe, and who shall not perish, but have everlasting life,) “that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever,” of all this number, “believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—Now, this is putting absurdity into the lips of infinite wisdom. But take the passage just as it stands, and its truth and simplicity are apparent. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” to die for this world, “that whosoever” of all this world which God loved and for which the Saviour died, “believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

There are other declarations of the bible upon which great stress is laid by those who maintain the doctrine of a limited atonement, and which are considered by many as settling the question in its favour. We refer to such passages as these. “The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”—“feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood”—“Christ also loved the church; and gave himself for it.” Upon these scriptures we would remark, that not one of them is contradicted by the doctrine of a general atonement,

because they do not assert, that the good Shepherd gave "his life for the sheep," and for them alone; or that the church was exclusively loved and purchased. This construction would contradict other parts of the inspired volume. If Jesus Christ tasted death "for every man," he did of course lay down "his life for the sheep"—and if he gave himself a "ransom for all," he certainly did give himself, at the same time, a ransom for "the church."

Believing that the doctrine of a general atonement is fairly supported, we are now prepared to close our discourse with a few INFERENCES AND REFLECTIONS.

First. In connection with the foregoing remarks, we infer, that a limited atonement would be an impeachment of the divine character.

Compare, for a moment, the different and various aspects of a limited atonement with the plain declarations of the bible and the acknowledged principles of the gospel, which have been stated in our present discourse.—We have seen that the call of the gospel, which includes an obligation to believe in Christ, and to rest upon him for eternal life, is made to all without distinction.—What, my brethren, can support a general offer, unless it be a general provision? Does it correspond with that truth and sincerity which belong to God, in an infinite degree, to proffer to his creatures—nay to urge and press upon his creatures, that which never had an existence? And yet this God is represented as doing, if the call of the gospel is universal, and the atonement

made by Christ, is, at the same time, partial. Yes, my hearers, this view of the atonement does represent God as offering more to sinners in the gospel, than was ever provided in the gospel. But the objection goes much farther than this. Sinners are expressly condemned for not becoming interested in that atonement or provision which is offered; and yet for them, on the limited scheme, no such atonement or provision was ever made. And this is not all. These rejecters of the gospel and despisers of the atonement, must feel the effects of their conduct to all eternity. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them. But why? What have they done? According to the principles of those who limit the atonement, they have rejected a certain provision which was offered to them, but which was never made; which was restricted to others while they were expressly excluded; which could not, from the very nature of its stipulations, include them and supply their necessities, though they had complied with the invitation and obeyed the command. In addition to all this, they are every where assured in the sacred volume, that their ruin is altogether attributable to themselves. Unbelief is represented as the great damning sin. And yet if the atonement is partial and limited, unbelief is inevitable. It must take place by a physical necessity, for there is no foundation for faith. Its exercise, for the want of which the sinner is condemned, would imply a natural impossibility. Indeed, for God to require the sinner for whom no atonement has been made, to believe in an atonement, and to rely upon this atonement for his personal salvation, is to require him to believe a palpable falsehood. No atonement was

ever made for him. To believe there was, would be to believe a lie ; and yet for the want of this belief or faith, he must feel the wrath and curse of God. We say, that here is a direct impeachment of the character of Jehovah ; and it is high time that christians should investigate this subject, and embrace the truth, and roll away this reproach.

We have said nothing as yet of the express contradiction between the scheme of a limited atonement and the plain declarations of the bible. The restrictive system says, that Christ is "the propitiation" for the sins of the elect, and for theirs alone ; the apostle John teaches us that he is likewise the propitiation "for the sins of the whole world." This system declares, that Christ "gave himself" for the church alone ; the apostle Paul tells us, that he "gave himself a ransom for all." The scheme which we oppose teaches, that Christ died for a part only of the human race ; the bible expressly declares, that he "died for all"—that he tasted "death for every man." This human theory would have us believe, that atonement and salvation are equally broad ; but the inspired volume affirms, that some deny "the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

Secondly. Our subject teaches us the ends to be answered by a general atonement.

It is sometimes said, that no great object can be obtained by a general atonement, if after all, but a part of mankind participate the saving benefit. But this

objection is founded on an imperfect and limited view of the subject. If the atonement is what we have represented it, a preliminary to the offer of pardon and peace ; if it contains such a provision for sinners in general as to lay them under obligations to believe in Christ, and turn to God, and live ; if it has furnished a new set of motives which ought to affect the hearts and conduct of men, as moral beings ; if it proposes the terms of eternal life, for the reception or rejection of which we must render an account, and the consequences of which we must feel to all eternity—then it is obvious, that the most important results are connected with such a provision. As it respects God, it is an exhibition of his benevolence, and as it respects man, it opens the door for his return to the friendship of his Maker. At all events, it must and will reveal to the universe the moral temper of the sinner's heart.

By the moral law the whole human race must stand condemned at the bar of God. Under this system there could be no escape. Despair and death would look every sinner in the face. Instead of executing this law upon us, God has "found a ransom." He has placed us once more, as it were, in reach of heaven. The door is thrown wide open before us. The terms, as founded upon the atonement, are, "He that believeth, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned."—This system will fully vindicate the divine character from every charge of cruelty in the death of the sinner. Not a shadow of reproach can rest upon it. Upon the broad basis of a general provision, God may proclaim through heaven, and earth, and his illimitable universe,

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” Do you, my dear hearer, rejoice that such ample provision has been made for sinners? Oh! recollect that the existence of such an atonement ought to make you solemn. The effects of it must be felt for ever. It will prepare for each of us a starry crown in heaven, or kindle for us a fiercer flame below. How full of interest—how fearful is the fact, that Christ has died for sinners! This fact creates a responsibility on the part of every hearer of the gospel, from which there is no escape. Life or death is the certain consequence,

Thirdly. This subject will enable us to understand many passages of scripture which are sometimes adduced in favour of universal salvation.

We must carefully and critically distinguish between atonement and actual redemption; between the provision made on the part of Christ, and its cordial reception on the part of the sinner. The atonement prepares the way for man's return to God; the application of this atonement, actually brings him back, and secures to him, in the covenant of grace, a title to the heavenly inheritance. The doctrine of general atonement, if properly understood, has no connection with universal salvation. There is no more connection between them, than there was between the ample and extensive entertainment mentioned in the parable, and the refreshment of those who utterly refused to come to the feast. Of what avail to them was the munificence of the marriage supper, when they preferred, and continued to prefer, their own

personal employments and pleasures? While "they made light" of the invitation, and went one to his farm and another to his merchandise, that feast could do them no good. It could afford them neither pleasure nor profit. Indeed it left them, in a very material point, worse than it found them. It brought them under the responsibilities created by a kind and gracious invitation—and eventually fixed upon them the guilt of its pertinacious and wanton rejection.

And so it is with the atonement made by Christ. It is sufficient for all; but it will no more save those who refuse to embrace it, than a sumptuous feast will satisfy the hunger of those who refuse to partake of the proffered bounty. General atonement furnishes a consistent ground for the publication of the glad tidings of the gospel. An atonement for all, will justify and sustain the offer of salvation to all. The result will be directed by the wise providence, and the sovereign grace of God. The final consequence will be a sentence of acquittal to the believer, and of condemnation upon the unbeliever.

Those who have contended, that the salvation of all men, would follow as a consequence from the doctrine of a general provision in the atonement, have uniformly entertained incorrect notions respecting the nature of this transaction. They have looked upon this whole affair as regulated by the principles of commutative justice. If it were the province of the atonement to repeal the curse, and liberate the sinner from all legal obligation, then, it would be readily acknowledged, that

a general satisfaction must be followed by a general redemption. But we have seen that this system is rotten to its very centre. By thinking men—by logical minds, it must and will be abandoned. An atonement which cancels guilt, and annihilates responsibility, has never been made. Such an atonement could not have been devised. Of such a provision, the bible utters not a whisper. There is an atonement which permits God, in perfect consistency with all the perfections of his nature and with all the important ends of law and government, to offer salvation to a guilty and expiring world. This same atonement lays the sinner who hears the gospel, under obligations to return to God; and, under the mediatorial system, his eternal destiny is suspended on his acceptance or rejection of the offered mercy. As to the believer, his sins are freely pardoned through the blood of Christ—and the Almighty arms surround, sustain and guard him. As to the unbeliever, continuing such, no atonement can reach his case. The blood of the new covenant, he treads upon in disdain. He lets go of the only anchor of safety—he extinguishes the last glimmering ray of hope. In one word, he rejects the Son of God, and, by this act, fixes the brand of reprobation upon his own soul. The law justly condemns him—but a rejected gospel will compel him to take a still lower and a darker place in the eternal pit.

These distinctions will enable us to comprehend and explain those passages of scripture, connected with the atonement, which are frequently perverted, and pressed into the cause of universal salvation. We refer to such

declarations as these—That Christ “died for all”—that he tasted “death for every man”—that he “taketh away the sin of the world”—and that “by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” These scriptures define the atonement, and not its effect. They declare the extent of the provision, and not the extent of salvation. The atonement made by Christ, and its acceptance on the part of the sinner, are entirely distinct and separate acts. Some for whom the Son of God expired, and to whom his salvation was freely offered, will behold, and wonder and perish. The blood of Christ, though shed for sinners, cannot, without its application to the heart, take away their guilt; and this blood has not extinguished the fires of hell. It remains an eternal truth, that the impenitent must perish—that the unbeliever must be damned. “He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

ADVERTISEMENT.



THE following Sermon on the Duty of Sinners to repent and believe the Gospel, was not included in the proposals for publishing the **SERMONS ON THE ATONEMENT**. It is appended to the foregoing work at the request of several members of my congregation, and some respected brethren in the ministry who once heard it preached at the opening of the Presbytery of Troy.

It is thought that it will form a suitable appendage to the preceding discussion; and as such, it is now commended to the candour of the church and the blessing of God.

THE AUTHOR.

TROY, Dec. 1824.

A SERMON.

THE DUTY OF SINNERS.



MARK i. 15.—“*Repent ye, and believe the gospel.*”

THESE words contain an injunction of Jesus Christ, and were uttered soon after he entered upon his publick ministry. John the Baptist, in accordance with the language of ancient prediction, had gone “before him in the spirit and power of Elias.” He was “the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” The preaching of this illustrious harbinger of the promised Messiah, was attended with the special blessing of God. Multitudes flocked to the standard which he erected in the wilderness, and there received those impressions which were intended to prepare them for the more explicit declarations of the gospel which were about to be announced. The great theme upon which he dwelt was repentance ; and in the execution of this preliminary and special mission, he admitted to the ordinance of baptism those who came to him “confessing their sins.”

One important point more was embraced in John’s commission ; and that was, to remind the house of Israel,

that their expected King and Redeemer was at hand.—“There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptised you with water : but he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost.”

About the time that this preparatory dispensation ceased by the imprisonment of John—Jesus Christ, having been consecrated to the office of High Priest by publicly submitting to the ordinance of baptism—“came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand : Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

From these words it appears, that Jesus Christ preached the gospel by enjoining repentance and faith upon sinners. He came into Galilee where his parents resided, and where he himself had been brought up, and there commenced preaching his own gospel by stating to his hearers by way of information, that the time appointed by the Father for the mission of his Son into our world, was actually fulfilled—and that the predicted reign of God was now at hand. The annunciation of these facts imposed upon them the obligation to repent of sin and embrace the promised Messiah. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

Nor is this obligation to repent and believe the gospel, confined to any particular period of this dispensation of mercy. Whenever the proclamation of pardon through Jesus Christ is announced, then it is the sinner's first duty to repent and believe the gospel.

To show that repentance for sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are immediate duties, binding upon every sinner who hears the gospel, is the object of our present discourse.

First. That sinners ought to repent and believe the gospel now, will appear from an examination of the nature of the christian exercises.

Look for a moment at repentance. What does it imply? It consists essentially in sorrow for sin founded on its intrinsic turpitude. The true penitent looks upon sin as it really is—and not as it appeared to him at the time of its commission. The original Greek word translated repentance, literally signifies an after-thought, or a change of mind; and implies a new moral feeling respecting transgression. In the act of sin, or in the violation of God's law, we approve of moral evil. The act is our own. It is a free and voluntary act, and is committed with the full consent of all the feelings of the heart. At the time of its commission, it is viewed as a present good. We speak here of that approbation which belongs to the heart, and not of those weak and ineffectual remonstrances which are made by the conscience.

Now repentance supposes a change of mind, or a different moral feeling in relation to the infractions of the rule of moral conduct. The act of sin is reviewed—and the real penitent condemns and hates that act which he once loved, and which he perpetrated with all his heart. He looks upon sin as committed against a law

which is "holy, and just, and good"—a law which embodies the perfections of the infinite God—and, consequently, as an act of hostility aimed directly at God himself. He looks upon himself as a wretch in arms against Jehovah—against his own happiness—and against the order and welfare of the universe. He takes sides with the law, as regards both the precept and the penalty, against himself. He feels, that he deserves to die ; and he abhors and hates his sinful heart and his sinful ways, This is repentance ; and this feeling every moral being who has ever sinned, ought to exercise without one moment's delay. It was the duty of Adam when he had committed the first sin, to repent. Without any gospel promise, or intimation of mercy—it was his duty to repent. In a sinner, without repentance, there can be no correct or holy feeling. If an apostate creature, then, is under obligations to cherish correct and holy feelings towards God, towards the law, and towards his own transgression—then it is his duty to repent without delay.

Let us look for a moment at the intrinsic nature of faith, and see whether the sinner ought immediately to believe the gospel. Two prominent ideas are embraced in evangelical or saving faith. One is, that it implies a reliance upon testimony. In this sense it is an intellectual act, and is neither holy nor unholy, except as it may have some connection, either direct or indirect, with the moral temper of the heart. As a mere intellectual act, we believe in the facts recorded in the gospel in the same manner, that we give credit to any other facts which have not transpired under our own eye,

but which are supported by competent testimony. Such is the evidence in favour of the inspiration of the gospel, that a candid investigation of the subject, must lead to a conviction of the truth. Infidelity—that is, a direct and open disbelief of the bible, is probably always the result either of sinful ignorance or wilful opposition to God. Diligence and honesty would invariably lead to a reception of the gospel, so far as faith is an act of the intellect. Unbelief, then, in this sense, or a speculative rejection of the gospel, is always a crime.

But it is in the moral nature of faith, that we are to look for its distinctive and essential character. As a moral or holy exercise, faith in the gospel implies a reliance upon Jesus Christ for salvation. This is the second prominent idea which is embraced in evangelical or saving faith. This faith supposes a just conviction of sin, and true repentance for it, as a most malignant and deadly evil. To believe the gospel, or to exercise faith in Jesus Christ, in this high and important sense, is to give up our opposition to God, which we have prosecuted by trampling upon his authority—and to return to him in the way of his appointment. If the sinner is not permitted to hate God—to make him a virtual liar—and to cherish and express his opposition and enmity against the scheme of eternal love for his recovery, then he is under obligations to credit what God has asserted, and to rely upon the provision which he has made for the chief of sinners. And if the sinner is under obligations ever to return to God by faith in Jesus Christ—he is under obligations to return now—to believe without delay. If unbelief, or a rejection of Christ, or enmity of heart

against the plan of God's mercy, be right for one moment—the same unbelief, and rejection of Christ, and enmity against God, would be right for ever.

Secondly. That sinners ought immediately to repent and believe the gospel, appears evident from the important place which repentance and faith occupy in the scheme of salvation.

From the important place which they occupy in the gospel scheme—repentance and faith have been styled the terms or conditions of salvation. The terms of the moral law are, "The man which doeth those things shall live by them." The terms of the gospel are, He that truly repents of sin; or he that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ—one of these christian graces always implying the other—"shall be saved."

When we represent repentance and faith as the conditions of salvation, we would not be understood to affirm that they form in any sense the meritorious ground of the sinner's acceptance with God. The gospel is a scheme of mercy from beginning to end. It was contrived for the recovery of sinners who deserve to die; and it is the same grace which originated the plan that carries this plan into effective operation. But our inquiry here is—not by what power the gospel is rendered effectual to the salvation of the sinner—but how must the sinner feel in order to embrace this gospel? Or in other words, what constitutes an acceptance of Jesus Christ and his salvation? What are the essential and peculiar exercises by which the sinner welcomes the gospel, and becomes a christian?

And here it will be discovered, on a moment's reflection, that repentance and faith are the grand peculiarities of the gospel scheme. They belong exclusively to the plan of redemption. They have no connection with the moral law. It is true, that a sinner, independent of the gospel, ought to be sorry for his transgressions, and to credit what God asserts—but it is in the covenant of grace alone, that repentance and faith are required as the terms of acceptance with God.

When we say, that repentance and faith are required of sinners as immediate duties, we mean that repentance which is unto life, and that faith which is connected with salvation. By these the gospel is accepted, and without these, the provisions of eternal love are spurned and trodden under foot. The point under examination, then, resolves itself into this question: Are sinners under obligations to embrace the gospel; and does this obligation press upon them at the present moment? If so, they must be under obligations to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—for without repentance and faith, there is no way in which the gospel can be received. While the offers of salvation have a claim upon our affections—and while these offers cannot be rejected without manifest and awful guilt; while the provisions of God's omnipotent love, and the blood of his expiring Son, cannot be slighted with impunity—so long will repentance for sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, press upon the sinner's conscience as his first and most important duties.

Thirdly. The guilt attached to impenitence and un-

belief, proves, that the sinner ought to repent and believe the gospel without delay.

The guilt attached to impenitence and unbelief. What we have to urge under this particular, will form the counterpart of those considerations which were stated under the first head of this discourse. We attempted in that place to show, that repentance and faith are in their very nature such exercises as are perfectly compatible with the character of God to require, and perfectly consistent with the condition of man to entertain or cherish. The conclusion was, that sinners ought immediately to repent and believe the gospel. And we shall be conducted to the same result, if we analyze the nature of impenitence and unbelief. But here let it be distinctly noticed, that under the preaching of the gospel, every man must be either penitent or impenitent, a believer or an unbeliever. There is no middle course, or neutral ground. The heart which is not the residence of repentance and faith, must necessarily be full of impenitence and unbelief.

And now let us examine the moral temper of these exercises. What is impenitence?—its complexion, or character? It is that disposition of heart, or temper of mind which justifies transgression, and determines to persevere in rebellion against God. This is the character of impenitence in those beings who are under the simple operation of the law, and who have never enjoyed the proclamation of mercy through the gospel. This is the impenitence of devils—and this was the impenitence of Adam before the first intimation of de-

liverance through the promised seed. But under the gospel the character of impenitence is still more malignant. It loves sin, and determines to cherish its emotions—It hates the law which forbids, and which will punish transgression—and it prosecutes a deliberate warfare against the character, the purposes, and the government of Jehovah. And all this in defiance of the thunders of Almighty wrath, and in contempt of the agonies of dying love. This is *impenitence*—and if this can be justified, then, no crime in Jehovah's empire can be condemned. If a creature may rebel against God, and may continue to repeat and to justify that rebellion, all of which is involved in impenitence, then omnipotence may break his sceptre, and abdicate his throne, for there is no law, or transgression, or responsibility, or government left. From the guilt involved in this course, there is no escape but by immediate repentance. Every other course involves a repetition of the crime.

What, too, is unbelief? We mean its spirit or moral temper? It is not a rejection of the gospel for the want of adequate testimony—for the gospel is often admitted in speculation, and yet excluded from the heart. The very essence of unbelief consists in opposition to the plan of salvation. It is enmity against God of the most aggravated character. It is not merely opposition to the perfections of God as expressed in the law—though this turned Satan and his angels out of heaven, and chained them in the pit—but it is opposition to God in the character of a Saviour. Unbelief is a sin against a remedy—and is, consequently, the sin of deep and black ingratitude. It is a sin against redeeming grace, and dying

love—a sin against the last effort of Omnipotence for the salvation of the soul. To say that unbelief is not criminal, would be to trifle with God, and to sport with his threatened curse. And for this conduct, there is no excuse. The unbeliever is every moment accumulating guilt—sinning with a high hand—and filling up the measure of his iniquity much faster than he could have done without the publication of the gospel. And from this guilt there can be no escape, but by repentance for sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith, then, are immediate duties, because impenitence and unbelief, which must exist where these exercises are wanting, are sins of the deepest die, and, when indulged and cherished, are perpetually treasuring up, for their subjects, “wrath against the day of wrath.”

Fourthly. That repentance and faith are required of sinners without delay, will appear from the express injunctions of the bible.

There is probably not one requirement of the gospel which does not expressly enjoin, or implicitly include repentance for sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.—This fact has been too much overlooked, or too superficially considered by the disciples of Christ, and, sometimes, even by those who are set for the defence of the gospel. Repentance and faith are peculiar to the gospel scheme, and belong exclusively to the religion of sinners. They are so essential, that the gospel cannot be embraced, and the soul return to God without them.—Hence the peculiar prominence which is given to repentance and faith in the instructions of Jesus Christ

and his apostles. Indeed the harbinger of Christ, who came to usher in the dawn of gospel day, enjoined immediate repentance upon the people, and directed them to believe on that promised Messiah who "should come after him." This was the foundation of all his preaching. Jesus Christ, too, commenced his own personal ministry, as we have already seen, by preaching the same doctrine—"Repent ye, and believe the gospel." This injunction stood in the very front of all his directions. He points out the plain and simple process by which men must serve God and secure the salvation of their own souls. They must feel and hate and renounce their sins, and repose a fiducial confidence in the merits of Jesus Christ. They must, in the peculiar and evangelical sense, repent, and believe the gospel. Till this is done, nothing can be done aright. When his hearers inquired of him, on a certain occasion, what they should do, that they "might work the works of God?"—he replied, "This is the work of God, that ye *believe* on him whom he hath sent." This was a work without which all other works would be of no avail. When the twelve disciples went forth, in the execution of their first commission, they not only proclaimed, as an object of faith to their hearers, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, but they "preached that men should *repent*."

And the same doctrines were taught, with still greater clearness, by the apostles after the ascension of Jesus Christ. They had now received a full commission to evangelize the world; and the divine Spirit was with them to defend them from error, and to direct them in the truth. To those who "were pricked in their

heart," on the day of Pentecost, "and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do?"—Peter replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Nothing could be more definite and specifick, than this direction. The apostle does not send these inquirers to a round of external duties, but tells them to repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—or, which is clearly implied in the injunction, to believe in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. The inquiry was, "What shall we do?" The answer was, "Repent, and be baptized"—or believe "in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." This was the only thing they were commanded to do, and this they were bound to do without delay. The same apostle, after assuring Simon Magus that he had "neither part nor lot in this matter," and that his heart was "not right in the sight of God"—presses him with this injunction, "Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Simon, by this direction, was not permitted to defer repentance long enough to pray. He is not allowed to remain impenitent even while he shall perform this single duty. The injunction is, repent—then pray. And this is the preaching of an inspired apostle to a man whom he perceived to be, at that very moment, "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." To the convicted Jailor who "came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas—and said, sirs, what must I do to be saved?"—these divinely directed teachers replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be

saved." This convicted sinner was in deep distress, and he needed immediate relief; and he is directed to believe in Christ without a moment's delay. If he would obey God, this is the first act to be performed.—No duty can be anterior to this. Paul in his Farewell Address to the Elders of Ephesus, reminds them of the manner in which he had fulfilled his commission as a minister of the gospel. "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."—In this manner the Lord of life, and, in this manner, the primitive disciples preached the gospel.

All these directions which have been cited, agree in their essential characteristic. They all expressly, or implicitly enjoin both repentance and faith upon sinners as their first duties. In some instances the terms are both mentioned—and in some, one only is named, and the other is included by implication. There can be no repentance unto life without faith in Jesus Christ, and no evangelical or saving faith, without repentance or godly sorrow for sin. And it is worthy of notice, that no other directions than these, are ever given to inquiring sinners in the bible. They are never pointed to any other course in order to procure the divine favour and attain the inheritance of heaven—neither are they set about any preparatory work, that their hearts may be inclined hereafter to repent and embrace the gospel.—All such directions are the inventions of men, and not the injunctions of the living God. The only instance

which has the least approximation to a departure from this rule, is to be found in the reply of Jesus Christ to the young man who inquired what good thing he should do, that he might have eternal life. "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The inquiry to which this direction was a reply, was not the inquiry of one convinced of sin, and anxious for deliverance from its present dominion and its future curse. Had this been the case, the direction would, no doubt, have been, "Repent, and believe the gospel." But this is the inquiry of a self-complacent moralist who expects to be justified and saved by the deeds of the law. "What *good* thing shall I *do*, that I may have eternal life?"—As the inquiry was of a *legal* character, so the answer corresponded with the import and spirit of the question. Christ told him just what he must do in order to be saved according to his own expectations. He must keep the whole law. "If thou wilt enter into life," upon these principles, "keep the commandments." The terms of the law are, "The man which doeth these things, shall live by them." It is evident from this whole narrative, and particularly from its conclusion, that the legal covenant was referred to in this case, for the ultimate purpose of conviction—in order to exhibit to this young man the true picture of his heart, and to expose the sandy basis upon which he was rearing the structure of his eternal hopes.

A FEW INFERENCES from what has been said will close this discourse.

First. There is nothing which prevents the sinner

from exercising repentance unto life, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that is not chargeable upon himself as his own fault.

Repentance and faith are certainly required of the sinner, as we have seen in the progress of this discourse. They involve in their very nature just such moral feelings as that creature ought to cherish who has been guilty of rebellion against God. By these the mercy of the gospel is accepted; and by their opposites, impenitence and unbelief, its provisions are set at nought, and the overtures of heaven are treated with contempt. In addition to all this, they are directly enjoined upon the sinner's conscience in the bible. They are required of every sinner by the authority of the independent God; they are enforced by the threatened pains of eternal rejection. From these considerations we infer, that there is nothing which prevents the sinner's compliance, but what is chargeable upon himself as his own fault.—A just and holy God would not require of his creatures the performance of acts which transcended their powers, or condemn them for a failure when a compliance with the injunction was impossible in the very nature of things. And yet as the sinner is elsewhere represented as dependent on the special grace of God for repentance, and faith, and salvation—this subject becomes involved in serious difficulty. Various are the theories which have been resorted to for the purpose of rational and consistent explanation.

Some have supposed, that the sinner is utterly unable, in every respect, to love God, or comply with the

terms of the gospel ; but vindicate the divine conduct in requiring impossibilities, on the ground that man lost his power by the fall. This solution does not appear to us to reach the case. To say that I am under obligations to love God, to repent of sin, and to believe in Jesus Christ, because Adam had the power and lost it, is to talk neither logick nor scripture. You might just as well say, that I am under obligations to exert the corporeal strength of one of my distant progenitors, who possessed the muscular powers of a giant, because he brought physical imbecility upon himself and his posterity by a course of indolence and excessive indulgence. Requirements of this nature would not comport with the government of an equitable man, much less with the government of a perfect God.

Others have attempted to obviate the difficulties involved in the sinner's dependence and responsibility by a different theory. They suppose that man is entirely helpless, in every sense, in himself—but that the obligations to repent and believe the gospel, are created by the fact, that God communicates assistance and grace to him without which these obligations would not exist.—This sentiment, though plausible, is unscriptural, and defective to the very core. To say, that the sinner's obligation originates in the divine assistance which is afforded him, and that there is no obligation without such assistance, is to say, that every thing which God has done for his redemption, is a matter of simple justice, and not of grace. According to this sentiment, sinners would have been under no obligations to love God without the provisions of the gospel—and since a Saviour

has been provided and offered to them, they are bound to repent of sin and accept of this Saviour no farther than the grace of God shall actually remove the obstacles which lie in the way of repentance for sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This theory destroys the very nature of grace ; it converts grace into debt ; a debt justly due from God to the sinner, and without the payment of which the sinner may continue without guilt to violate the law, and to reject and spurn the provisions of the gospel. Indeed, this sentiment would, in every instance, make the moral temper of the creature, the measure of moral obligation ; and we should never be bound to do what we were not disposed, or what God should not actually dispose us to perform. This would be throwing the reins upon the necks of men, and upon the necks of devils ! Inclination becomes the universal law.

But all these theories for reconciling the sinner's obligations with his dependance, are founded in a radical error respecting the nature of the difficulty to be removed. There is nothing which stands in the way of man's return to God by repentance for sin and faith in Jesus Christ, but the want of a disposition to return.—The difficulty is wholly of a moral, and not of a physical character. It is opposition to the truth, and enmity of heart against God, and nothing else, which chains him fast in impenitence and unbelief. It is a voluntary bondage—a bondage which he cherishes with all his heart—cherishes in defiance of the worm that never dies and of the fire that is never quenched—and which is his last,

and black, and damning sin—cherishes in despite of the groans and agonies and blood of Calvary!

Should it be said, that sinners cannot repent and believe the gospel, we answer, that there is no inability in this case, except that which consists in the want of a disposition, or heart, or will to repent and believe. It is not a natural, but a moral inability. This distinction is made in common life, and is all-important in preaching the gospel. Whatever a man cannot do if he would, in this, he is under a natural or physical inability; but when the only reason why he cannot do a thing, is, that he does not choose to do it, the inability is of a moral nature. In the former case there is no blame; in the latter, the greater the indisposition, or the inability if you please, the greater the guilt. We hesitate not to say, that if repentance and faith, or obedience to any other divine injunction, required the exercise of physical powers, whether mental or corporeal, which the sinner does not possess in his present state, he would be under no obligation to repent, or believe, or obey any injunction of that character. Had man been required to remove the Alps, and to number the drops which compose the ocean, as the conditions of salvation, he would have been under no obligations to comply with these terms.—All the authority of Omnipotence could not impose or enforce upon man an obligation to the performance of these acts, because a compliance with such terms or conditions, would be impossible in the very nature of things, though his heart were pure and holy as the heart of Gabriel himself. These are acts which the sinner could not do if he would; and here is natural inability; and here a

failure in obedience could be attended with no blame or guilt. And so it is in every case of this description.— A natural or physical impossibility annihilates obligation, and precludes the existence of sin.

But when commanded to repent of sin and believe the gospel, we labour under no such difficulty as this, and can avail ourselves of no such excuse. We have all the corporeal strength and all the intellectual comprehension, necessary to comply with this injunction. In short, we have all the powers which constitute a moral agent. We are free to follow our own unrestrained and voluntary choice ; and it is in the exercise of this agency, that we refuse to repent and believe the gospel.

But it may still be said, that an inability, is an inability ; and whether natural or moral, it must exempt the sinner from obligation, and excuse him from blame.— This remark contains a common, though a grand error in philosophy, as well as religion. A moral inability, which consists in the strength of the disposition, whether holy or unholy, never does, and cannot, interfere with blame or praise. Indeed it is this very thing which constitutes the deepest blame upon the one hand, and the highest praise upon the other. It is expressly said of God, that he “cannot be tempted with evil.” He “cannot.” But why cannot God be tempted with evil ? For this reason, and this alone—he is prevented by his own intrinsic and eternal holiness. It is morally impossible. But shall we, on this account, say that God is not immaculate, and deserves no song of praise ? That he is so holy, that he “cannot be tempted with evil,”

constitutes the supreme excellence of his nature. The angels in heaven, too, are under a moral necessity to love and obey God. It is their strong and constant disposition—their unchanging moral temper to love what God loves, and to do what he commands. They must feel and act in this manner, unless these angels were converted into devils! But shall they, on account of the strength and uniformity of their holy affections, forfeit all claim to divine and human approbation? Certainly not. This is the very foundation of their angelick excellence. It is just so with the saints in glory. They are so swallowed up in God and celestial contemplations, that they cannot sin. But does this detract from their character—because they are so holy, that they cannot sin? This is the very thing which renders them lovely in the sight of God and of all the blessed universe.

And now look at the other side of this moral picture. We have seen, that moral inability to do wrong—that is, a strong and uniform disposition to feel and act correctly—a disposition if you please infinitely strong, does not rob holy beings of their merit, but is the very thing for which they deserve the highest praise. Apply the same principle to beings of an opposite character. It is admitted on all hands, that the devils are given up to uninterrupted and perpetual evil. Their enmity to God is so great, that they cannot obey him. Sin is their continued and eternal element. Now, do these circumstances take away their malignant and devilish character? Does the fact, that they hate God supremely—and must continue to hate him supremely, take away all the guilt of their opposition and enmity against him? This prin-

ciple would whiten hell into innocence! No, my brethren, this cherished and unyielding enmity against God—this high-handed and unrelenting opposition to the throne of heaven, is the very moral temper, that constitutes them devils. And the more settled this temper, and the stronger this disposition, the more malignant the character and the deeper the guilt. It is just so with wicked men—with sinners in our world. They refuse to repent and believe the gospel, merely because they love sin and hate God. There is no barrier in the way except that which is erected by a wicked heart. And shall the love of sin be made an excuse for a continuance in sin? And shall enmity against God, be presented as an apology for disobedience to his commands, and rebellion against his throne? Why, my brethren, this is the very thing for which God condemns the impenitent and the unbelieving. It is because their hearts are so fully set in them to do evil, so determined in their opposition to holiness, that they will not repent and believe; that they are condemned in this world, and will be condemned in the world to come. And the greater this enmity and opposition, the greater the sinner's guilt. Let him love sin so intensely, and hate God with such malignity, that he will not, and, in this sense, cannot repent and believe in Jesus Christ—and you add the last trait to an ungodly character, and render the subject for ever without excuse.

Secondly. We see the true reason why divine influence is necessary to the production of repentance and faith.

That repentance and faith are enjoined upon sinners,

has appeared sufficiently evident in the progress of the present discussion. It is a point equally clear, that men are brought to comply with this injunction—that is, to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—by the agency of the Spirit of God. The Bible is full of this sentiment. The consistency of these two declarations may be easily established. When sinners are called upon to repent and believe the gospel, they are called upon to do that which is enforced upon them by moral propriety—to do that which they might perform if they would—and which they would do if their hearts were right with God. If the Spirit of God was given for the purpose of removing some physical imbecility—to repair our natural powers which had become deranged or shattered by the fall—or to impart some new faculties, then the command to repent and believe, would be just and reasonable no farther than it should be attended with a divine influence which should actually remove every obstacle in the way of a sinner's return to God. In this case, man would be under obligations to love and obey God, when the divine Spirit should enable, or rather capacitate him to do it.

But incapacity is not the thing to be removed. It is a wicked heart that refuses to repent—it is enmity against God, that will not be saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. To conquer this heart, and to subdue this enmity, is the great business of the Spirit of God in bringing the sinner to the knowledge of the truth. The sole reason why divine influence is necessary in our recovery from sin and our restoration to God, is the deep and desperate wickedness of our hearts. The Spirit of

God is sent to bow that stubborn will which ought to yield to the truth though no such influence were afforded; to melt into contrition that heart which ought to be agonized for sin from its own spontaneous emotions; and to lead to the arms of Jesus Christ those souls which would gladly take refuge in his bosom, were they not under the dominion of that sinful and malignant spirit which says—and continues to say, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” These considerations reconcile the whole difficulties involved in the facts, that sinners ought to repent, and believe the gospel—and are, at the same time, inclined to exercise repentance unto life and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, under the influence of the Spirit of God.

Thirdly. As repentance and faith are immediate duties, there can be nothing acceptable to God while these are neglected.

These exercises are essential to the religion of a sinner. They are interwoven with the whole gospel scheme. Without them, man is the enemy of God, and “dead in trespasses and sins.” In the heart of the impenitent sinner, there is not one particle of that “holiness without which no man shall see the Lord”—and “he that believeth not is condemned already”—and “the wrath of God abideth on him.” Let the external conduct be what it may—the impenitent and unbelieving sinner is the enemy of God. His deportment and feelings may be modified by a thousand circumstances—but through all the changing scenes of life and death, unless he repent and embrace the gospel, he sustains the same

essential character in the sight of God. He can possess nothing good till his heart melts into repentance, and closes in with the offered grace. Hence the uniform directions of the bible to sinners—"Repent ye, and believe the gospel." They are never set about any other work. If they refuse to repent and believe, they are not told, that they may use the means of grace as a substitute, but are faithfully warned, that they must "perish"—that they must "be damned." And on this point, the minister of the gospel has no authority to make a compromise. He must press repentance and faith upon the conscience, as they are pressed upon sinners in the gospel. Nothing can come before these as a duty. Even the best external acts, where these are wanting, are an abomination in the sight of God. Here he must nail the sinner down. He must make these arrows sharp in the hearts of God's enemies. He must give them no quarters. If the awakened sinner resort to the common plea, that he cannot repent and believe, he must drive him from this refuge of lies, by faithfully testifying, that enmity against God is the only reason why he does not and cannot comply with these conditions. And while this enmity is cherished, no other directions could be of any avail. Such a heart can be pierced by nothing short of repentance, and melted down by nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ. This the minister of the gospel must press, and this the sinner who hears the gospel, must feel. Should he lower down the requirements of the bible to suit the disposition, or to accommodate the taste of the impenitent and unbelieving—he does it at his peril. Should he direct the awakened or convicted sinner to the reading of the bible, to the instructions of the sanc-

tuary, to prayer, or to the performance of any other external services, with the permission or implication, that he may attend upon them with just such a heart as he now has—that is, under the dominion of impenitence and unbelief, with the expectation that God will bless him in the use of means—he may, perhaps, by this course, quiet his conscience, and flatter him into a good opinion of himself. He may, in this manner, patch up a righteousness with which he will invest his polluted soul—but it will be no better than an apron of fig-leaves. There is little prospect, that such instructions will drive him from self-dependance, or lead him to Christ, or guide him to heaven. This whole system of directions is bottomed in fundamental and destructive error. It is true, that the sinner must read his bible—but if he would please God, he must not read it with an impenitent heart ; he must pray—but not with his soul chilled to the very centre by unbelief ; he must go to the sanctuary—but not in league with sin, and in hostility with heaven. He must repent and believe—and thus read the bible ; he must repent and believe—and thus pray ; he must repent and believe—and thus go to the sanctuary ; and he is bound, in the spirit of penitence and faith, to attend upon all the appointed means of grace. Till this is done, God is not, and cannot be obeyed. He that thus repents and believes, “shall be saved” with an everlasting salvation. AMEN AND AMEN.

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