

# THE ATONEMENT.

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BY

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## TO THE READER.

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THE atonement of Jesus Christ is an unspeakably important branch of gospel truth ; and every scriptural, intelligent, and godly exposition and defence of it ought to be welcomed by the living church of God. Mr. Atkinson has placed this subject before us in the following pages, in a thoughtful, interesting, and edifying manner. Some parts are treated with an originality, which is one of the writer's characteristics, that will generate thought, and expand the reader's view of this great subject. Such a work is required at the present time ; for by some the holy mystery of Christ's sacrifice is wholly ignored, and in the minds of others it takes no definite form and its solemn glories are lost amidst a multitude of vague generalities. I therefore cordially recommend this work to our churches, and to all that may be seeking information concerning " Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

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## INTRODUCTION.

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BEFORE directing attention to the subject of this treatise, a few preliminary remarks seem to be required.

In the greater part of the works extant on sacred subjects, the doctrine of the Atonement is more or less dwelt on; and this is so of necessity, because the subject is interwoven with the whole fabric of the truth relating to the salvation of sinners; and, besides, there are also not a few treatises written specially on the subject. These facts may be considered as a sufficient reason why the writer, unless he can pretend to give some quite original information on the subject, should be content to be quiet, or to exercise himself in other directions. But what has been well said on another matter may be repeated here: "A publication is not rendered improper or needless, because works of a similar nature have preceded it."

It might be urged, if not in justification of the act, yet in mitigation of an objection, that if several treatises on the same subject are extant, another may have some valuable quality peculiarly its own. If it were not a presumption to compare things so insignificant with things so supremely important, the question might be asked, Who complains that we have four Gospels? Besides, erroneous publications, or what at least we deem such, are ever teeming from the press; and although the errors they contain may have been repeatedly refuted, it ought not to be regarded as killing the dead to refute them again. It may also be urged that some who receive the doctrine of the atonement seem to be "neither cold nor hot" in the interest they take in it. Others again are confessedly confused in their judg-

ments about some of its qualities, such for, instance, as its extent and efficacy, with their grounds. Some again, it may be hoped, are beginning to make earnest enquiries about the atonement. We therefore venture to advance our opinion. If hereby some may obtain a more correct view of the matter, if the interest of others is quickened, and if some who are at present personally unconcerned about the matter shall come to ask, "Wherewith shall I make the atonement?" and shall find a satisfactory answer to their enquiry in the precious truth of the atonement made, the publication will be justified, and the writer will feel abundantly rewarded.

Strange as the fact may appear as seen from one point of view, it is certainly impossible for a man to state his opinions on hardly any single part of divine truth without contradicting some other men's, and so, by consequence, without entering into controversy. But whatever opinions of other men may be incidentally or purposely contradicted in the statement of our own on this subject, controversy, be it understood, is not the object sought, but edification. Some of the questions which have arisen in connection with this subject, and which have been vigorously debated, will be taken for granted. For instance, the necessity of an atonement, the proper divinity of Christ, the vicariousness of his sufferings, and the sacrificial and expiatory character of his death. Whoever may be in doubt on these points, and may require proof of them, must be referred to the labours of those who have wrought so nobly and successfully in refuting arguments which, for their subtlety and perniciousness might justly, without offence, be regarded as prompted by him who unites in himself at once the character of a deceiver and a destroyer.

In entering upon the consideration of this subject, it seems particularly necessary that we should clearly define, and that it should be clearly understood, what we mean by the word atonement. For a definite meaning, as it seems to us, is not always given to the word, and sometimes when a definite meaning is attached to the

word, it is not a correct one. As to the etymology of the word we are not much concerned. We do not care to controvert the commonly received notion that to the word *one* a termination, indicating an action of the mind, was added, and that so an absolute verbal noun *onement* was formed; and that afterward the preposition *at* was prefixed to make *at-one-ment*. But if this is taken to mean no more than the reunion and intercourse of parties, effected in any manner, who have been, from some cause, at variance, such meaning is, it is most certain, very inadequate to express what is, or what ought to be, understood by the word in religious discourse, when speaking of the atonement of Christ. If this alone were intended, reconciliation, not atonement, would be the proper word.

What we mean by the word atonement is a particular mode, namely, his obedience unto death, by which the Lord Jesus accomplished a just and certain reconciliation between God, as the Representative and the Guardian of Justice, and some persons who, having transgressed the commanded will of the holy, just, and good Lawgiver, had become liable to the declared penalty of the law. Hence, therefore, it will be observed, that reconciliation and atonement are clearly distinguished from, but closely related to, each other; just, indeed, as are effect and cause. In the New Testament the word atonement occurs but once, and in that instance, as written in the margin, only in the sense of reconciliation. But in the Old Testament, in connection with those expressive sacrificial types of the great Sacrifice, the word frequently occurs, and in its exact sense.

Having made these few remarks, we proceed to consider, as we may be enabled, the atonement of Christ in its connection with the Sovereignty of God, with his Justice, and with his Mercy.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST IN ITS RELATION TO DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY.

IF God is, dominion must belong to him. If he were not Lord, he would not be God. But God is, and "He is Lord of All." An absolutely supreme dominion is his by right, and in fact. But the sovereignty he has and exerts over his intelligent creatures is not solely that of a proprietor, but also that of a moral governor. As such he subjected man to a law which is holy, just, and good. This law may be taken as a transcript, so far as any law can be, of his own nature; and it may be confidently concluded that, while he will suffer none who are subject to this law to break a single precept with impunity, he himself, in any of the acts of his sovereignty, will never violate its principles. In the outworking of his sovereignty, then, there will be nothing unholy, unjust, nor evil. If, therefore, nothing apart from God controls his sovereignty, the immutable excellencies of his own nature will ever secure its beneficial exercise. "Thou art good," said the Psalmist, "and doest good."

Seizing thus on this fundamental truth of God's nature, we may grasp with unmistakable certainty the fixed relation of that truth to all God's acts, and may hold fast our confidence against all the opposition of apparent contradictions. For the existence of apparent contradictions we do not deny. To do so would be fanaticism. No man can open his eyes without seeing such presentments. He cannot but see that, however much power has been exerted to preserve physical order

in the universe, moral disorder abounds; that if some of the angels have been upheld to keep their first estate, others of them were left miserably to fall; and that moral order has been overthrown in the person of the father of our race with fearfully calamitous consequences to all his posterity. Losing sight of God's sovereignty herein, men have come to deny his excellency, and the necessary result of assuming these false premises has been the adoption of the fool's conclusion, "There is no God." If, say they, God is good, he is not almighty; or if almighty, he is not good. Ignoring thus God's sovereignty, and judging only from appearances, their reasoning to them is irrefutable. Their mistake lies in ignoring the lordship of God. Only as we acknowledge the sovereignty of God exerting almightiness under the direction of wisdom and holiness and justice and goodness, both as to way and end, can the mind find rest. Simple faith in God, in other words, is here the only anchor of the soul. This gives quiet.

Divine sovereignty is especially illustrated in the existent occasion for the atonement, in the admission of a substitute, in the provision of the Substitute, and in the appointment of the beneficiaries.

Sin, the *existent occasion* for an atonement, we say, can find no solution of the difficulty it presents to the human mind apart from divine sovereignty. Philosophers have speculated very foolishly on this subject, fanatics have very madly raved about it, and the friends of God have very impertinently apologized for the conduct of the Lord of all about it; but after all, the fact remains just where the philosopher, the fanatic, and the friend found it, and just what that fact was, a judgment of divine sovereignty that is unsearchable, and a way that is past finding out.

Reasoning on the ways of God as the great moral Governor, it has been thought no temerity to conclude that, given the creation of beings capable of moral agency, of being determined in their actions by external inducements as well as by internal taste, of being influenced by contemplated good and evil, of suffering

and enjoyment, it would not comport with wisdom wholly to prevent this capability from an actual working; that is, wholly to prevent such creatures from sinning by the effectual exertion of a preserving power. But on the knowledge men at present have of this matter, we unhesitatingly denounce this conclusion. It is more than temerity—it is a desperate daring. This notion is not self-evident truth, it is not a logical conclusion drawn from undoubted premises, it is not a revelation, and there are existing facts which are out of harmony with it. Has not God preserved the unfallen angels? Does not their preservation comport with his wisdom? Will it not comport with the wisdom of God to preserve his ransomed ones in unsinning obedience for ever? Is there danger and doubt about another fall occurring in heaven? No doubt the opportunity, as it is said, “to declare his righteousness,” and the moral virtues of the creature, which arises out of the existent occasion for the atonement of Christ, results from the wisdom of God; but it would be a boldness more than impudent to say, God needed this opportunity for himself, or for his creatures. Granting that the Divine Being should not only be, but should also *show* himself to be, holy, just, and good, would it overmatch the wisdom of God to show all this without the existence of an odious, a damnable, and a miserable contrast? What! are the odiousness, and crime, and misery of earth, and the damnation of hell, means originally taken in the wisdom of God to illustrate by contrast his holiness, and justice, and goodness? If this is philosophic divinity, it may be questioned whether the philosophic divine, or the blaspheming infidel, presents the more striking exemplification of the forbearance of God.

It may appear becoming to the philosophic divine to say, that the divine glory and the greatest good on the whole to the creatures are inseparable ideas. But is there a man who is able to present examples of this inseparability of ideas in connection with certain associated facts, and make them intelligible to the human mind? He is a pragmatic prater, though he may dress and sit



as a philosopher, who, on the knowledge man now has, talks about the good of evil. In truth, all existence of evil shocks the moral sense of man, and confounds his reason. Who knows the good of, or feels the better for, the least evil or the greatest? Who feels that the existence of hell and of devils is good on the whole to God's creatures, or who on the whole understands that he is the better for their existence?

Granting that man being created with such moral principles as charity and sympathy, it is congruous that these principles should have some fitting occasion afforded for their manifestation; would it overmatch the devising power of infinite Wisdom to find suitable occasions for their display without the existence of evil? Must it necessarily be taken to be a display of infinite Wisdom to devise human wretchedness, in order that kindly human virtues might find an occasion for their manifestation? If charity, draped, so to speak, with beneficence, sits an acknowledged queen among the beautiful forms of grace which adorn human minds and manners, might she not appear with equally queenly beauty in some other drapery? If a hospital for incurables and an asylum for idiots present fine occasions for beautiful charity in her appropriate garb to display her lovely form, what man is there who has a brother, or what father is there who has a child, ever so well cared for in either of these valuable institutions, who does not feel that it would be better for his brother, or for his child, for himself, for all, and, therefore, better on the whole, if no occasion had ever presented itself for the exhibition of this loveliness of charity? Sympathy in tears is one of the potent touches of nature that link the world in kinship. David, mourning for Absalom, is a painfully pleasing example of this sympathy. No man can fail to feel with that afflicted father who reads of his affliction, nor can fail to feel a luxury in his own sympathetic grief. But few, too, can read that afflicted father's peerlessly charming exclamation of his sorrow without admiration. But is there a man who can feel that on

the whole, it is better for the community of God's intelligent creatures that Absalom was driven away in his wickedness, because an occasion was afforded for the manifestation of the loveliness of sympathy in tears? Might it not have been a sufficient opportunity for the display of sympathy if there had been only a joyous object?

Jesus Christ could, indeed, thank his Father, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, for evil—for the evil of human privation, and that privation one of the most serious which can afflict man, the hiding of the truth of the gospel. But Jesus Christ is, and possesses the knowledge of, the God-man. If a mere man should venture to imitate him herein, he would be guilty of gross inhumanity, and of foul presumption.

Men, if they will, may amuse themselves and others by attempting to penetrate the impenetrable secrets of God, and by making guesses at the reason and fitness of things; but the attempts must be abortive, and the guesses vain. It must be found that nowhere below a simple acknowledgment of a divine sovereignty which is searchless in its ways, is there any ground on which, with his present knowledge, man can set his foot. Knowing only in part, and unable to find out the Almighty to perfection, it will be "the meekness of wisdom" to guess nothing, and to "judge nothing before the time." He will be the most philosophic here who is content to walk in an opened way, and there is no other way yet opened to man but to behold, admire, confide, and devoutly say, "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Revelation, it is true, and the truth is precious, teaches us that all things work together for good to them that love God; but this is an altogether different matter. And even this truth we know for the most part, just as we know a great deal beside that is, simply by faith, as taught in the Word of God. Those that have the privilege to stand on the vantage-ground held by them that love God may often be found holding their peace,

like Aaron, with the submission of faith, rather than rejoicing with acquiescence from a well understood knowledge of the good unto which all things affecting them are working together. What godly man is there that has had occasion to acknowledge the righteousness of God's judgments to him, who has not felt his acquiescence to be halting of both feet, and who has not yearned, as Jeremiah did, to talk with God at the same time about his judgments? We are far from saying that infinite wisdom is not displayed in human wickedness and human woe; but we do say that the wisdom of God in the existence of evil, is not a subject for philosophy to explain, but for faith to believe.

But however little is known of God's reason for the existence of sin, and guilt, and misery, we do know for certain that law is, and sin is, and guilt is, and misery is; and we know with equal certainty that the evil of sin has created a posture of affairs which can only be effectually met by the atonement of Christ. This atonement *the Divine Sovereign has admitted*, and the admission is a prime article in the plan of grace.

That the Supreme Ruler possessed the sovereign right to admit an atonement, provided always a substitution could be found having every essential quality to give it validity, there ought to be no doubt. But the possession of the right would not oblige to exercise it, and did not. The admission was an act of high and pure sovereignty, and the sovereign act was a pure favour. In the use of this sovereign prerogative, the sentence of the law was dispensed with, the supreme Lawgiver was subordinated to the supreme Ruler, and distributive justice gave way to commutative justice. But for the Sovereign putting this prerogative in action, the sinner must have been subject to the penalty of his wrong under the award of justice, in his own person. But on the employment of this sovereign right, an act of commutative justice followed, which is unique in its kind, which is chargeable with no injustice, which brings no ultimate loss to the Substitute, which, more than anything else, illustrates the excellency of the law,

which secures a respect for the law, and which satisfies the claims of the law on behalf of innumerable criminals who otherwise would have miserably perished for ever under its just sentence. Herein is wisdom, and "herein is love," blended with sovereignty. The functions of the Judge, of the Lawgiver, and of the King, are harmoniously discharged in respect of criminal defaulters, and yet the offenders are saved. "The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; he will save us." This testimony finds its most illustrious meaning and fulfilment in the admission of the substitution of Christ. The King subordinates the Lawgiver and the Judge, and yet exalts and glorifies them by the subordination. Provision is made by the King for a higher manifestation of the Lawgiver by a magnification of the law otherwise unattainable, for the awards of the Judge to be executed so as fully to meet the justice of the case, and for righteousness and life to be secured to myriads of transgressors. "Great is the mystery of godliness."

But divine sovereignty has more than admitted an atonement; the Sovereign has *provided the Substitute*. Milton, having introduced the Father as admitting a substitute for offending man, represents the Supreme as asking the assembled choir of heaven where such a one might be found, having a "charity so dear," as to become a substitute, and who, being willing, should be able to "pay the rigid satisfaction, death for death."

"He asked, but all the heavenly choir stood mute,  
And silence was in heaven."

To have admitted a substitute, without providing one, would have left the sinner in helpless ruin. But offended Majesty provided the Substitute. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." — "He spared not his own Son."

It will appear from this that if the great business of reconciliation through the atonement of Christ be represented as a *merely personal* affair of sacrifice and propitiation between the Father and the Son on behalf of

others, the representation will be false and misleading. In the atonement of Christ it is not to be considered that the Father is determined to have a personal revenge on sinners; that the Son, moved with pity towards them, is willing to interpose himself and to let the Father's revenge be wreaked on him; that the Father is pleased, therefore, to wound his innocent Son in their stead and to satisfy his vengeance and pacify his wrath; and that, his vengeance being satisfied through the shedding of innocent blood and his wrath relieved, he is willing to release the offenders from the pains of hell and to advance them to the pleasures of heaven. Such a representation may befit a pagan atonement, but not the atonement of Christ. God will, indeed, by no means clear the guilty; but the object of the punishment is not to wreak a personal revenge and to appease a personal fury, and so to obtain such a personal consolation as a gratified revenge affords; but to vindicate holiness, righteousness, and goodness, in the justification of the ungodly. God willed to have mercy. This mercy is a natural element of his goodness; and the purpose to shew mercy is a sovereign outcome of his goodness. But in order to vindicate his justice and holiness as represented in his law, he, in showing mercy, admits and provides a Substitute who makes a proper atonement for those to whom mercy is shown. Hence the admission of an atonement and the provision of the Substitute are at once the manifestation and the commendation of his love. The Judge, indeed, punished the Surety, and vindicated the Lawgiver in the atonement of Christ; but here everything is official. Of the personal God in the whole of this wondrous transaction, it should ever be proclaimed that, "Yea, he loved the people!"

Not choosing to make this obvious and necessary distinction, the enemies of the atonement of Christ have charged on its friends the representation of a weak and unseemly irascibility and of a change in God,—that he is now angry, and anon soothed and appeased. And from not keeping this distinction clearly in view, it may well be questioned whether the friends of the atonement

of Christ have not made representations of God, which have injuriously misled poor penitent transgressors when seeking forgiveness; whether they have not so represented the severity of his justice as to hide the manifestation of his grace; whether they have not shrouded divine love in the cross with a covering of unrelieved terror; and whether they have not spoken of the just God after a manner so as to leave a doubt in the mind of the poor sinner, rather than so as to raise and confirm his hope of obtaining the precious blessing. Truthfully represented, there will be seen in the cross the admission of an atonement and the provision of the great Substitute. In these will be seen the commendation of Divine love, and herein the humbled sinner's surest argument in prayer, and best ground of hope for the pardon of his sins. Never let it be forgotten by those to whom is committed the ministry of reconciliation, that it is in the cross we see that "God is love." And on this ground let them never fail to proclaim among all men, with the utmost latitude, to whomsoever it may concern, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Lastly, Divine sovereignty is exemplified in *the appointment of the beneficiaries* of the atonement of Christ. It was for God alone of his sovereign will to admit of an atonement, and thereby, in effect, to say, "I will have mercy." And it was for God only, of his sovereign will, to determine the extent of the admitted atonement, and to say, in effect, likewise, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." But nowhere more than here may it be said, "With God is terrible majesty." Nowhere more than here does the Lord of all gather about him clouds and darkness, nor anywhere say with more lofty magisterialness, "Be still, and know that I am God." Here God's thoughts are different from man's thoughts, and they are not less contrary than different. In nothing more than in rendering a reason for this unrevealed part of the mystery of God's will

could men exemplify the saying of the apostle, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Nowhere is submission required more than here, and nowhere is submission more difficult. Full acquiescence is impossible. To talk of acquiescence in full, while knowing only in part, is the ranting of folly, or the raving of fanaticism, or the sanctimonious mumbling and suppressed raging of a gratified malignity. O for grace to say, with submission, "The will of the Lord be done!"

All unsubmission, and all contradiction notwithstanding, a particular extent is an attribute of the atonement of Christ. And if the reason of nothing may be more difficult to understand,—yea, the reason of this is utterly confounding to the human understanding,—the truth of nothing can be plainer, according to the Scriptures, than that the atonement of Christ, in its relation to persons, is ruled by sovereignty, and is limited. What it is in itself in fact as to extent, and what it is in effect, are after considerations. Here we speak only of its extent in design as to persons, and we say in this respect it is limited, and as definite as it is limited. If a few remarks will not be sufficient to represent this truth, a folio volume of elaborate argument would not be enough.

It is presumed that no man in his senses can imagine God not to have purposed the atonement, or that he can imagine God to have formed and entertained an indefinite purpose. Foreknowledge, and predestination, and calling, and justification, and glorification, it is certain, are predicated of the self-same persons; can it be imagined that the atonement has a more extended reference than these? And if so, would not the purpose of God in the death of his Son be, so far, made void? When will men cease daring to say that, in any sense, or in respect of any persons, "Christ is dead in vain?"

The typical representations of the atonement in the Levitical sacrifices, had all of them a limited and definite reference. The burnt offering presented by an individual was "to make an atonement for him," and that offered for

the people was "to make an atonement for them." And the same applies to the sin-offering and to the trespass offering. Can any man imagine that the atonement made by these offerings extended beyond those for whom they were offered? If these were but shadowy representations of Christ, they were, nevertheless, truthful.

When the angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to call the name of Mary's son Jesus, he gave this reason: "For he shall save his people from their sins." He saved his people from their sins by an atonement for them. He certainly did no less than this; on what grounds can it be said that, in any sense, he did more than this? Did he save any people, in any sense, whom he will fail to save in every sense? Does he emptily bear this name in any respect relative to any people? They will not, who cannot, see limitation here.

The Lord Jesus speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd, who possesses a flock of sheep. "I know my sheep," he says; and he says, "I lay down my life for the sheep." For them also for whom he died he prayed; and we are informed, with a very solemn distinctness, that he prays for no others. "I pray for them," he says, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me." If a man misses the mind of God here, it cannot be from want of perspicuity in the teaching; is it from perverseness in the will?

In every age of the world there have been peoples who never so much as heard of the atonement of Christ. If God spared not his own Son to make an atonement for these, would he not have sent to them some of his servants to whom he had committed the word of reconciliation, that the good news might be heard, and the benefit be appropriated? If he had redeemed these persons by a price so costly, would he not, as the Scripture speaks, "hiss for them and gather them?"

It is said, and we repeat the saying with some consciousness of its awful solemnity, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." We are also taught that, in the day of judgment, Jesus will say to them who are separated to his left hand, "Depart, ye cursed." Did the



Lord Jesus make an atonement for these? If he did, who is advantaged? Is there any glory arising to him, or any benefit to those who are banished, or to any others? Does it not appear congruous that if God spared not his own Son to make an atonement for them, he would not spare anything requisite to accomplish their reconciliation? Is not the atonement of Christ a cause? Will not reconciliation, the effect of atonement, be commensurate with its cause? And if not, seeing both are of the Lord, why not?

Just a concluding word on this part of the subject. We read of obeying the gospel. Obedience to the gospel, in many things, is exceedingly difficult. But, perhaps, there is no doctrine of truth which exacts a greater submission of the judgment, than that of the existent occasion for making an atonement, or a greater sacrifice of feeling, than that of the limitation of the atonement made. What, however, we know not now we shall know hereafter. Yet now even we know that if God sways an authority over the destinies of men, irresponsible as that of the potter over his clay, he is ever controlled of himself. And until the sight of his ways in the light above is granted, adored be his name for faith enough to believe that, "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful."

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE ATONEMENT IN ITS RELATION TO DIVINE JUSTICE.

IN entering on this subject it seems proper to remark that in all government there must be law, by which obedience and disobedience may be known. But there is a difference between arbitrary and moral government. In an arbitrary government, laws may be established which have not the sanction of the moral judgment; and if such be the case anywhere in fact, justice will have no

place there. A breach of law which has no moral sanction, though it be a disobedience, is not felt to be a moral wrong, while the breach of a law which is itself morally wrong, is felt to be a virtue; and if in the breaking of such a law a penalty is incurred, to have incurred that penalty will make the transgressor, in his own and the public estimation, a hero, and to have suffered the unjust and immoral award, will make him a martyr.

God's government is a moral government. If the will of God be regarded as his law in his kingdom, it should be understood that his will is the will of the Holy One, the Just, and the Good, and that his governing will in all that it is, results from his moral nature. Hence the transgression of his law is not only a disobedience, but the disobedience is sin—is a moral wrong. It is because the transgression of the law of God is sin in the moral judgment, that the transgressor is, neither in his own nor the public estimation, a hero in breaking the law, nor a martyr in suffering its award, but a sinner—a moral wrong-doer. Therefore in the government of God justice has a natural place.

Justice is equity: moral right as opposed to moral wrong. This is the essence of justice. If any are pleased to call justice, by interpretation, a modification of benevolence, or to say, justice includes within itself every virtue, there need be no objection raised.

Justice in a moral government will be exemplified in vindicating the obedient, in punishing the disobedient, in rewarding the meritorious, and in vindicating the justified. Or, to use the well-known formula, justice will be exemplified in giving to every one his due. Every example of justice in a moral government is found in connection with the atonement of Christ.

I. There is a vindication of the obedient. Jesus was personally obedient, and he was personally vindicated. But the question arises, What was the rule of Christ's obedience, personally considered? Seeing that he had a created nature, it seems congruous that a natural obligation to obey some law devolved on him by a natural

consequence. But seeing that his created nature never had an independent personal existence apart from his divine nature, who is there that seeks to know what might have been, or may be, the natural obligation of Jesus Christ to obey law, and what might have been, or may be, the law given him to obey, that does not feel he is seeking knowledge under the utmost difficulty? It is, indeed, true that He, speaking in prophecy, says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." True also, among other things which may be taken to bear on this point, he said during his ministry, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." "I do always the things that please him." "I have kept my Father's commandments." But who of mortals is able accurately to distinguish herein between natural obligation and the discharge of natural duty, and official engagements and their perfect discharge? Who has the perspicacity to see where duty ended, and the discharge of assumed obligations began? If a line is to be drawn between what was done as a natural duty, and what was done in discharge of assumed obligation for a meritorious acquirement, (and it seems congruous there should be a line somewhere,) God only can draw that line. With befitting humility, an able writer on the subject has suggested that the line should be drawn between those acts of our Lord Jesus Christ which were physical, or merely intellectual, and his moral acts, together with all the moral qualities of his complex acts. But this seems very unsatisfactory, for the reason that it appears to denude the human nature of Christ of all moral qualities. To us it seems that an accurate knowledge of this matter is impossible and unnecessary. Whatever may have been the law whereby the duty of the Lord Jesus was prescribed, that he did his duty perfectly is certain; and it is equally certain that justice vindicated the obedient Jesus, and gave him his due. But in the performance of this his duty, it ought to be, though it is feared that it is not, clearly understood, that Jesus merited nothing. He only did the duty which

was required of him in justice. Had he have done no more than his duty, whatever this may have been, he would have made no atonement for others. We should still have been under the law, and in our sins.

II. There is a punishing of the disobedient. Justice and vengeance differ. Strictly speaking, there is no vengeance in God, nor does this passion form an element of justice. Vengeance, properly so called, can only be sated by the pain or injury desired to be inflicted upon the person himself against whom the fury of the avenger burns. It wholly declines the offices of a substitute if any such are offered. It steadily and sternly refuses to be pacified by the suffering or injury of another than its proper victim. If in the wildness of its rage it strikes at any relation of its object, this is simply on the ground of that relation having some identity with the object, and because the object himself cannot be reached. Vengeance is a personal and private feeling; it is the flaming of a personal and private wrath from whatever cause kindled; it admits of no propitiation by another, nor does it, in sating itself, seek any public good, but only its own consolation. If, therefore, vengeance, in its strict sense, were an element of justice, the substitution of Christ and an atonement thereby would have been absolutely impossible. In that case, justice could only have been satisfied by the punishment of the offenders themselves.

Retribution is, however, an element of justice; and this was, in spirit and effect, exactly exhibited in the atonement of Christ. By disobedience demerit has entered. Demerit is more than punishable. If sin were not punished at all, there would be a failure of justice; and if sin were not punished adequately, there would be a proportionate failure of justice according with the inadequacy of the punishment. It wholly comports with man's moral sense of right and wrong that the demerit of sin should be dealt with judicially for its own sake. Of the demerit of sin every moral agent is conscious, but of the just award of that demerit God is the sole judge. From the Word of God we learn "the wages of sin is death."