

# Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 227

## ATONEMENT

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*“I lay down my life for  
the sheep.”*

John 10:15

### Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,  
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,  
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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## ATONEMENT

#227

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# THE MOST REMARKABLE EVENT

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

**T**HE death of Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the most remarkable event in all history. Its uniqueness was demonstrated in various ways. Centuries before it occurred, it was foretold with an amazing fullness of detail by those men whom God raised up in the midst of Israel to direct their thoughts and expectations to a fuller and more glorious revelation of Himself. The prophets of Jehovah described the promised Messiah, not only as a person of high dignity Who should perform wondrous and blessed miracles, but also as one Who should be “despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3) and Whose labors and sorrows should be terminated by a death of shame and violence. In addition, they affirmed that He should die not only under human sentence of execution, but that “it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (Isa 53:10), yea, that Jehovah should cry, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd” (Zec 13:7).

The supernatural phenomena that attended Christ’s death clearly distinguish it from all other deaths. The obscuration<sup>1</sup> of the sun at midday without any natural cause, the earthquake that clove asunder the rocks and laid open the graves, and the rending of the veil of the temple from top to bottom proclaimed that He Who was hanging on the Cross was no ordinary sufferer.

So too, that which followed the death of Christ is equally noteworthy. Three days after His body had been placed in Joseph’s tomb and the sepulcher securely sealed, He, by His own power (Joh 2:19; 10:18), burst asunder the bonds of death and rose in triumph from the grave. [He] is now alive forevermore, holding the keys of death and hades in His hands (Rev 1:18). Forty days later, after having appeared again and again in tangible<sup>2</sup> form before His friends, He ascended to heaven from the midst of His disciples. Ten days after, He poured out the Holy Spirit, by Whom they were enabled to publish to men out of every nation in their respective languages the wonders of His death and resurrection.

As another has said, “The effect was not less surprising than the means employed to accomplish it. The attention of Jews and Gentiles was excited; multitudes were prevailed upon to acknowledge Him as the Son of God and the Messiah; and a Church was formed, which, notwithstanding powerful opposition and cruel persecution, subsists<sup>3</sup> at the present hour. The death of Christ was the great

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<sup>1</sup> **obscuration** – darkening.

<sup>2</sup> **tangible** – able to be touched or perceived through the sense of touch.

<sup>3</sup> **subsists** – continues to exist.

subject on which the apostles were commanded to preach, although it was known beforehand that it would be offensive to all classes of men; and they actually made it the chosen theme of their discourses. ‘I determined,’ Paul said, ‘not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified’ (1Co 2:2)...In the New Testament, His death is represented as an event of the greatest importance, as a fact on which Christianity rests, as the only ground of hope to the guilty, as the only source of peace and consolation, as of all motives the most powerful to excite us to mortify<sup>4</sup> sin and devote ourselves to the service of God.”<sup>5</sup>

Not only was the death and resurrection of Christ the central theme of apostolic preaching and the principal subject of their writings, but it is remembered and celebrated in heaven. The theme of the songs of the redeemed in glory is the Person<sup>6</sup> and blood of the Savior: “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Rev 5:12). “The atonement made by the Son of God is the beginning of the ransomed sinner’s hope and will be the theme of his exultation, when he shall cast his crown before the throne, singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.”<sup>7</sup>

Now, it is evident from all these facts that there is something peculiar in the death of Christ, something that unmistakably separates it from all other deaths, and therefore renders it worthy of our most diligent, prayerful, and reverent attention and study. It behooves<sup>8</sup> us by all that is serious, solemn, and salutary<sup>9</sup> to have just and right conceptions of it, by which is meant not merely that we should know when it happened and with what circumstances it was attended, but that we should most earnestly endeavor to [find out] what was the Savior’s *design* in submitting to die upon the Cross, why it was that Jehovah smote Him, and exactly what has been accomplished thereby.

But as we attempt to approach a subject so important, so wonderful, yet so unspeakably solemn, let us remember that it calls for a heart filled with awe, as well as a sense of our utter unworthiness. To touch the very fringe of the holy things of God ought to inspire reverential fear. But to take up the innermost secrets of His covenant, to contemplate the eternal counsels of the blessed Trinity, to endeavor to enter into the meaning of that unique transaction at Calvary, which was veiled with darkness, calls for a special degree of grace, fear, and humility, of heavenly teaching, and the humble boldness of faith...When we remember that the Atonement is the most important subject that can engage the minds of either men or

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<sup>4</sup> **mortify** – put to death; See FGB 201, *Mortification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>5</sup> **John Dick**, *Lectures on Theology*, Vol. 3 (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2004), 95.

<sup>6</sup> See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>7</sup> **James A. Haldane**, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (William Whyte & Co., 1845).

<sup>8</sup> **behooves** – is appropriate for.

<sup>9</sup> **salutary** – beneficial.

angels; that it not only secures the eternal happiness of all God's elect, but also gives to the universe the fullest view of the perfections of the Creator; that in it are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, while by it are revealed the unsearchable riches of Christ; that through the very Church that has been purchased thereby is being made known to principalities and powers in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10)—then of what supreme moment must it be to understand it aright! But how is fallen man to apprehend these truths to which his depraved heart is so much opposed? All the force of intellect is less than nothing when it attempts, in its own strength, to comprehend the deep things of God. Since a man can receive *nothing* except it be given him from heaven (Joh 3:27), much more is a special enlightenment by the Holy Spirit needed if he is to enter at all into this highest mystery.

“Great is the mystery of godliness” (1Ti 3:16). Amazing beyond all finite conception is that transaction that was consummated at Golgotha! There we behold the Prince of Life dying. There we gaze upon the Lord of Glory made a spectacle of unutterable shame. There we see the Holy One of God made sin for His people. There we witness the Author of all blessing made a curse for worms of the earth. It is the mystery of mysteries that He Who is none other than Immanuel, should stoop so low as to join the infinite majesty of Deity with the lowest degree of abasement that was possible to descend into. He could not have gone lower and be God. Well did the Puritan Sibbes say, “God, to show His love to us, showed Himself God in this: that He could be God and go so low as to die.”<sup>10</sup>

To what source then can we appeal for light, for understanding, for an explanation and interpretation of the Cross? Human reasoning is futile, speculation is profane, the opinions of men are worthless. Thus, we are absolutely shut up to what God has been pleased to make known to us in His Word...

The plan of redemption, the office of our Surety,<sup>11</sup> and the satisfaction that He rendered to the claims of justice against us have no parallel in the relations of men to one another. We are carried above the sphere of the highest relations of created beings into the [majestic] counsels of the eternal and independent God. Shall we bring our own line to measure them? We are in the presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one in perfection, will, and purpose. If the righteousness of the Father demands a sacrifice, the love of the Father provides it. But the love of the Son runs parallel with that of the Father; and not only in the general undertaking, but also in every act of it we see the Son's full and free consent. In the whole work, we see the love of the Father as clearly displayed as the love of the

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<sup>10</sup> **Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)**, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, Vol. 5, 327.

<sup>11</sup> **Surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another; as our Surety, Christ guaranteed a full legal satisfaction for our sin and our deliverance upon His payment of our debt upon Calvary's cross.

Son. And again, we see the Son's love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity as clearly displayed as the Father's, in that work of which it were impossible to tell whether the manifestation of love or righteousness is most amazing. In setting out upon the undertaking, we hear the Son say with loving delight, "Lo, I come to do Thy will" (Heb 10:7, 9). As He contemplates its conclusion, we hear Him say, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Joh 10:17). They are one in the glorious manifestation of common perfections and in the joy of all the blessed results. The Son is glorified by all that is for the glory of the Father. And while, in the consummation of this plan, the wisdom of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—shall be displayed, as it could not otherwise have been, to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. Ruined man will be exalted in Christ to heights of glory and bliss otherwise unattainable.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

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**A.W. Pink (1886-1952):** Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England.



# THE ETERNAL COUNCIL OF GOD

John Gill (1697-1771)

I shall [now] consider the operations and transactions among the three divine Persons when alone before the world began or any creature was in being. [These] are chiefly the *council*<sup>1</sup> and *covenant*<sup>2</sup> of God respecting the salvation of men. These are generally blended together by divines...But I think they are to be distinguished and the [*council*] to be considered as leading on, preparatory, and introductory to the [*covenant*], though both [are] of an eternal date.

[I] shall begin with the council of God, held between the three divine persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—concerning the affair of man’s salvation before the world was...To give some proof that there was a council between the divine Persons concerning the salvation of men, an argument in favor of this may be drawn from the *purpose* of God, all Whose purposes are called His *counsels* because they are founded in the highest wisdom (Isa 25:1). Now, the purpose of God respecting the salvation of men is the basis and foundation of the council held concerning it, in which purpose, as well as council, all the three Persons are concerned. For the scheme of salvation, which is “the manifold wisdom of God,” is “according to the eternal purpose which he [*God the Father*] purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:10-11).

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<sup>1</sup> **council and counsel:** The author uses both *council* and *counsel* throughout this article. He uses council to mean “a meeting to discuss and decide something” and counsel to mean “what ought to be done as a result of the discussion.”

<sup>2</sup> Differing views exist among those who believe in God’s eternal purpose of salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Some believe that God’s eternal purpose is expressed in two covenants: (1) a Covenant of Redemption, which is made in eternity among the members of the Godhead, which is the foundation for (2) a Covenant of Grace, which is made in history between God and His elect (i.e., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, etc.). Of those who believe in the Covenant of Redemption, some believe that it is between the Father and the Son, while others include all the members of the Trinity. However, some believe that God’s eternal purpose is expressed in only one Covenant of Grace, which has an *eternal* aspect between the members of the Trinity and an *historical* aspect between God and His elect (i.e., Edmund Calamy, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Gill, Hugh Martin, Benjamin Keach, etc.). For helpful discussions on this subject, consult Joel Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, Reformation Heritage Books, 237-278; Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants*, Solid Ground Christian Books; David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Bought Her*, Crossway Books, 201-223. Gill’s article was not chosen because CHAPEL holds his one covenant view, but because he concisely covers important issues that are generally agreed upon regarding God’s eternal purpose.

Not only was the Son privy to<sup>3</sup> this purpose or counsel and agreed to it, but the Spirit [was] also, Who searches “the deep things of God” (1Co 2:10) and approves of them, which are no other than the purposes and counsels of His heart.

It appears there was a consultation held about the salvation of men from the gospel, which is an exhibition and declaration of the scheme of salvation. [It is] called the “counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) and “the wisdom of God,” the hidden wisdom ordained before the world (1Co 2:6-7), for it is no other, indeed, than a transcript of the council and covenant of grace. The sum and substance of the word and ministry of reconciliation is that eternal transaction between God and Christ concerning it...That there has been such a transaction between the Father and the Son, which with propriety<sup>4</sup> enough may be called the “counsel of peace” (Zec 6:13), we have sufficient warrant from 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses.” By the “world” is meant the elect of God [that] He so loved as to send His Son to be the Savior of and for the life of whom Christ gave His flesh (Joh 3:16; 6:51). And about the peace and reconciliation of those, or in what way to make peace and atonement<sup>5</sup> for them, God was in Christ or with Christ, consulting, contriving, and planning the scheme of it, which was this: not to impute their sins unto them, but to Christ, now called to be the Savior of them. This contains the sum of what we mean by the council of peace.

I proceed...to observe that the three divine Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—and they only, were concerned in this council:

**Jehovah the Father**, first Person in order of nature, though not of time, may reasonably be supposed to give the lead in this affair...He Who—concerning the creation of man, proposed it to the other two Persons—might with great propriety move for a consultation about His salvation. [He] is the Ancient of days, with Whom is wisdom and Who hath counsel and understanding. Yea, [He] is wonderful in counsel, as well as excellent in working, and so infinitely fit to conduct an affair of this nature (Job 12:12-13; Isa 28:29).

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<sup>3</sup> **privy to** – sharing in the knowledge of.

<sup>4</sup> **propriety** – appropriateness; fitness.

<sup>5</sup> **atonement** – During the latter part of the nineteenth century the word *atonement* became commonly employed to express that which Christ wrought for the salvation of His people. But before then, the term used since the days of Anselm (1274), and habitually employed by all the Reformers, was *satisfaction*. The older term is much to be preferred, first, because the word *atonement* is ambiguous [*open to more than one interpretation*]. In the Old Testament, it is used for a Hebrew word that signifies “to cover by making expiation [*to remove the guilt of sin*].” In the New Testament, it occurs but once (Rom 5:11), and there it is given as the rendering for a Greek word meaning “reconciliation.” But reconciliation is the effect of the sin-expiating and God-propitiating work of Christ. On the other hand, the word *satisfaction* is not ambiguous. It always signifies that complete work that Christ did in order to secure the salvation of His people, as that work stands related to the will and nature of God. (A. W. Pink, *The Satisfaction of Christ: Studies in the Atonement*, 18)



**Jehovah the Son** has the same wisdom, counsel, and understanding His Father has; for all that [the Father] hath are His, nor does Christ think it any robbery to be equal with Him (Phi 2:6). He is wisdom itself...He is possessed of consummate<sup>6</sup> wisdom. In Him, even as Mediator,<sup>7</sup> are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He Himself says, “Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom” (Pro 1:20; 8:14; Col 2:3). Yea, He is called “Wonderful, Counsellor” (Isa 9:6), which not only respects His capacity and ability to give the best counsel and advice to men, as He does, but to assist in the council of God Himself...Christ the Son of God was as one brought up with His divine Father, lay in His bosom, was privy to His designs, and must be in His council. [Christ] was on all accounts fit for it.

**The Holy Spirit** had a concern in this council and was fit to be of it...He is not only the Spirit of wisdom to men...but He is the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge *to* and resting *on* Christ as Mediator (Isa 11:2). Therefore, [He] must be a very proper Person to be concerned with the Father and the Son in this great council. For never was such a council held as this, between such Persons, and on such a momentous and interesting affair. Which...is next to be considered more particularly and distinctly.

Now the affair consulted about was not the salvation of men merely, nor who should be the persons that should be saved with it...But [it was about] who should be the Savior or the author of this salvation. A proper person for this work could never have been devised, found out, and settled upon by men and angels: this was the business of this great council.

By the decree of election, the vessels of mercy were prepared for glory or were ordained to eternal life. God resolved to have mercy on them and save them...The case stands thus: it was in Jehovah the Father’s thoughts to save men by His Son. He in His infinite wisdom saw [His Son as] the fittest person for this work and in His own mind chose Him to it...Now in the eternal council, He moved and proposed it to His Son, as the most advisable step that could be taken to bring about the designed salvation. [His Son] readily agreed to it and said, “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God” (Heb 10:7) from Psalm 40:7-8. The Holy Spirit expressed His approbation<sup>8</sup> of Him as the fittest person to be the Savior by joining with the Father in the mission of Him, as before observed, and by forming His human nature in

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<sup>6</sup> **consummate** – perfect.

<sup>7</sup> **Mediator** – a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (1689 London Baptist Confession 8.1, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY) See also FGB 183, *Christ the Mediator*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>8</sup> **approbation** – official approval.

time and filling it with His gifts and graces without measure (Joh 3:34). The pleasure and satisfaction the three divine Persons had in this affair, thus advised to, consulted, and approved of, is most clearly to be seen and observed at our Lord's baptism (Mat 3:16-17).

But not only was it in this council consulted who should be the Author of salvation, but also in what way and manner it should be effected—both for the security of men and for the display of the glory of the divine perfections.

Now, it should be observed that the elect of God—the persons to be saved—were considered in this transaction as fallen creatures, which salvation by Christ supposes; as sinners in Adam, on whom judgment came unto condemnation; as obnoxious to the curses of the righteous Law and to the resentments of divine justice. Therefore, *satisfaction* must be made to the Law and justice of God: the Law must be fulfilled and justice satisfied by an atonement made.

This was signified to the Savior found, Who approved of it as a most fit thing to be done. Hence, God is gracious and saith, “I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24). This was found by infinite wisdom in this council; and whereas this ransom,<sup>9</sup> satisfaction, and atonement, must be made by obeying the precepts of the Law and by the suffering of death, the penalty of it, the Law required this of the transgressor of it: “Thou shalt surely die,” and so of the Surety for him. Wherefore, since it was necessary that the Captain and Author of salvation in bringing many sons to glory should be made perfect through sufferings, it was proper that He should assume a nature in which He would be capable of obeying and suffering—even a nature of the same kind with that which sinned. This was notified in council to the Son of God, and He approved of it as right and fit and said, “A body hast thou prepared me” (Heb 10:5)—a whole human nature, in purpose; and now in council, [He] signified He was ready to assume it in time.

Moreover, it was seen proper and advisable that the human nature assumed should be holy and pure from sin that it might be offered up without spot to God and be a sacrifice to take away sin, which it could not be if sinful. Now here a difficulty arises, how such a nature could [be had], since human nature would be defiled by the sin of Adam. Who would be able to “bring a clean thing out of an unclean” (Job 14:4)? Infinite wisdom surmounts this difficulty by proposing that the Savior should be born of a virgin; that this individual nature to be assumed should not descend from Adam by ordinary generation, but be formed in an extraordinary manner by the power of the Holy Ghost. This was approved in council by both the Son and Spirit, since the one readily assumed this nature in this way, and the other formed it.

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<sup>9</sup> **ransom** – a release by payment of a price.

Once more, it appeared necessary that this nature should be taken up into personal union with the Son of God or that the Savior should be God and man in one person; that He should be man that He might have somewhat to offer and thereby make reconciliation for the sins of the people; and that He should be God to give virtue to His deeds and sufferings, to make them effectual to the purposes of them, and He be a fit Mediator, a daysman, between God and men [to] take care of the things belonging to both.

In short, the affair...consulted between the three divine Persons was the peace and reconciliation of God's elect by Christ and the way and manner of doing it. Therefore, as before observed, this transaction may be called with great propriety the council of peace.

From *A Complete Body of Doctrinal Divinity Deduced from the Scriptures*,  
Baptist Standard Bearer, [www.standardbearer.org](http://www.standardbearer.org).

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**John Gill (1697-1771):** Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar; born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.



# THE INTENT OF CHRIST'S DEATH

John Owen (1616-1683)

**B**Y the end<sup>1</sup> of the death of Christ, we mean in general, both, first, that which His Father and He intended *in* it; and, secondly, that which was effectually fulfilled and accomplished *by* it. Concerning either, we may take a brief view of the expressions used by the Holy Ghost:

**FOR THE FIRST:** Will you know the end wherefore and the intention wherewith Christ came into the world? Let us ask Him, Who knew His own mind [and] all the secrets of His Father's bosom, and He will tell us that "the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Mat 18:11)—to recover and save poor lost sinners. That was His intent and design, as is again asserted [in] Luke 19:10. Ask also His apostles, who know His mind, and they will tell you the same. So Paul, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1Ti 1:15).

Now, if you will ask who these sinners are towards whom He hath this gracious intent and purpose, He tells you that He came to "give his life a ransom for *many*" (Mat 20:28)—in other places called *us*, believers, distinguished from the world. For He "gave himself for *our* sins, that he might deliver *us* from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal 1:4). That was the will and intention of God that He should give Himself for *us* that we might be saved, being separated from the world. They are His *Church*: "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25–27). [The] last words express also the very aim and end of Christ in giving Himself for any: that they may be made *fit* for God and brought nigh unto Him. The like whereof is also asserted, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Ti 2:14).

Thus clear, then, and apparent is the intention and design of Christ and His Father in this great work—what it was and towards whom, namely, to save *us*, to deliver *us* from the evil world, to purge and wash *us*, to make *us* holy, zealous, fruitful in good works, to render *us* acceptable, and to bring *us* unto God. For through Him, "we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom 5:2).

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<sup>1</sup> **end** – the intended result of an action; accomplishment of a purpose; goal.

Also, the effect and actual product of the work itself—or what is accomplished and fulfilled by the death, blood shedding, or oblation<sup>2</sup> of Jesus Christ—is no less clearly manifested, but is as fully and very often more distinctly expressed [by the following]:

**First, *reconciliation*** with God by removing and slaying the enmity<sup>3</sup> that was between Him and us. For “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:19). Yea, He hath “reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2Co 5:18). If you would know how this reconciliation was effected, the apostle will tell you that [He] “abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph 2:15-16), so that “he is our peace” (Eph 2:14).

**Secondly, *justification***<sup>4</sup> by taking away the guilt of sins, procuring<sup>5</sup> remission and pardon of them, redeeming us from their power with the curse and wrath due unto us for them. For “by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1Pe 2:24). We have “all sinned, and come short of the glory of God”; but are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past” (Rom 3:23–25). For “in [him] we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14).

**Thirdly, *sanctification***<sup>6</sup> by the purging away of the uncleanness and pollution of our sins, renewing in us the image of God, and supplying us with the graces of the Spirit of holiness. For “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14). Yea, “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1Jo 1:7). [He] “by himself purged our sins” (Heb 1:3). To “sanctify the people with his own blood, [He] suffered without the gate” (Heb 13:12). He gave

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<sup>2</sup> **oblation** – a sacrifice offered to God.

<sup>3</sup> **enmity** – feelings characteristic of an enemy; hatred.

<sup>4</sup> **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) See FGB 187, *Justification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>5</sup> **procuring** – obtaining with special care or effort.

<sup>6</sup> **sanctification** – Sanctification is the work of God’s Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin, and live to righteousness. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 34) See FGB 215, *Sanctification*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Himself for the Church to sanctify and cleanse it that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:25-27). Peculiarly amongst the graces of the Spirit, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ...to believe on him" (Phi 1:29), God blessing us in Him with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Eph 1:3).

**Fourthly, adoption**<sup>7</sup> with that evangelical liberty and all those glorious privileges that appertain<sup>8</sup> to the sons of God: for "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:4-5).

**Fifthly**, neither do the effects of the death of Christ rest here. They leave us not until we are settled in heaven in glory and immortality forever. Our inheritance is a "purchased possession" (Eph 1:14). "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). The sum of all is [this]: the death and blood shedding of Jesus Christ hath wrought and doth effectually procure for all those that are concerned in it eternal redemption, consisting in grace here and glory hereafter.

Thus full, clear, and evident are the expressions in the Scripture concerning the *ends* and *effects* of the death of Christ that a man would think every one might run and read! But we must stay: among all things in Christian religion, there is scarce anything more questioned than this, which seems to be a most fundamental principle. A spreading persuasion there is of a *general ransom* to be paid by Christ for all: that He died to redeem *all and every one*—not only for *many*, His *Church*, the *elect* of God, but for everyone also of the posterity of Adam.

Now, the masters of this opinion do see full well and easily that if *that* be the *end* of the death of Christ that we have from the Scripture asserted, if those before recounted be the immediate *fruits* and *products* thereof, then one of these two things will necessarily follow: either, first, God and Christ *failed* of their end proposed and did not accomplish that which they intended—the death of Christ being not a fitly-proportioned *means* for the attaining of that end...To assert [this] seems to us blasphemously injurious to the wisdom, power, and perfection of God, as likewise derogatory<sup>9</sup> to the worth and value of the death of Christ. Or else, all men, all the posterity of Adam, *must be saved*, purged, sanctified, and glorified, which surely they will not maintain. At least the Scripture and the woeful experience of millions will not allow.

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<sup>7</sup> **adoption** – Adoption is an act of God's free grace whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 33)

<sup>8</sup> **appertain** – belong as a privilege to.

<sup>9</sup> **derogatory** – showing a disrespectful attitude or a low opinion.

Wherefore, to cast a tolerable color upon their persuasion, they must and do deny that God or His Son had any such absolute aim or end in the death or blood shedding of Jesus Christ or that any such thing was immediately procured and purchased by it, as we before recounted. But that God intended nothing, neither was anything effected by Christ, that no benefit ariseth to any immediately by His death but what is common to all and every soul—though never so cursedly unbelieving here and eternally damned hereafter—until an act of some, not procured for them by Christ (for if it were, why have they it not all alike?), to wit, *faith*, do distinguish them from others. Now, this seeming to me to [weaken] the virtue, value, fruits, and effects of the satisfaction and death of Christ—serving, besides, for a basis and foundation to a dangerous, uncomfortable, erroneous persuasion—I shall, by the Lord’s assistance, declare what the Scripture holds out in both these things, both that assertion that is intended to be proved and that which is brought for the proof thereof; desiring the Lord by His Spirit to lead us into all truth, to give us understanding in all things, and, if anyone be otherwise minded, to reveal that also unto him.

From “The Death of Death in the Death of Christ” in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol. 10, 157-160, The Banner of Truth Trust, [www.banneroftruth.org](http://www.banneroftruth.org).

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**John Owen (1616-1683):** English Congregational pastor and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



# OUR NEED FOR ATONEMENT

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.—1 John 1:7*

**M**AN'S sins are many and great. It is of the utmost importance that these sins should be cleansed away. Man's guilt in the sight of God is enormous. Man's danger of hell after he dies is imminent<sup>1</sup> and tremendous. Yet man cannot cleanse away his own sins! It is written, and it is true, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified" (Rom 3:20).

(a) **It will not cleanse away your sins *to be sorry for them*.** You may mourn over your past wickedness and humble yourself in sackcloth and ashes. You may shed floods of tears and acknowledge your own guilt and danger. You may, you must, you ought to do this. But you will not by so doing wipe out your transgressions from the book of God. SORROW CANNOT MAKE ATONEMENT FOR SIN.

The convicted criminal in a court of justice is often sorry for his offences. He sees the misery and ruin they have brought upon him. He mourns over his folly in not listening to advice and in giving way to temptation. But the judge does not let him off because he is sorry. The deed has been done; the law has been broken; the penalty has been incurred.<sup>2</sup> The punishment must be inflicted, notwithstanding the criminal's tears. This is precisely your position in the sight of God. Your sorrow is right, good, and proper. But your sorrow has *no* power whatever to cleanse away your sins. It needs something more than penitence<sup>3</sup> to take the burden off your heart.

(b) **It will not cleanse away your sins *to mend your life*.** You may reform your conduct and turn over a new leaf. You may break off many evil habits and take up many good ones. You may become, in short, an altered man in all your outward behavior. You may, you must, you ought to do so. Without such change, no soul ever was saved. But you will not, by so doing, wipe away one particle of your guilt in God's sight. REFORMATION<sup>4</sup> MAKES NO ATONEMENT FOR SIN.

The bankrupt tradesman, who owes ten thousand pounds and has not ten shillings to pay, may resolve to become a reformed character. After wasting his whole substance in riotous living, he may become steady, temperate, and respectable. It is all right and proper that he should be so: but this will not satisfy the claims of

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<sup>1</sup> **imminent** – about to happen.

<sup>2</sup> **incurred** – brought upon oneself.

<sup>3</sup> **penitence** – sorrow or regret for having done wrong.

<sup>4</sup> **reformation** – improving or correcting one's own conduct or morals.



those to whom he owes money. Once more, I say, this is precisely your case by nature in the sight of God. You owe Him ten thousand talents<sup>5</sup> and have “nothing to pay” (Luk 7:43). Today’s amendments<sup>6</sup> are all very well, but they do not wipe away yesterday’s debts. It requires something more than amendment and reformation to give you a light heart and to set your conscience free.

(c) **It will not cleanse away your sins to become *diligent in the use of the forms and ordinances of religion*.** You may alter your habits about Sunday and attend services from morning to night. You may take pains to hear preaching on weekdays, as well as on Sundays. You may receive the Lord’s Supper on every possible occasion, give alms,<sup>7</sup> and keep fasts. It is all very well as far as it goes. It is a right and proper thing to attend to your religious duties. But all the means of grace in the world will never do you any good so long as you trust in them as saviors. They will not bind up the wounds of your heart and give you inward peace. FORMALITY<sup>8</sup> CANNOT MAKE ATONEMENT FOR SIN...

(d) **It will not cleanse away your sins *to look to man for help*.** It is not in the power of any child of Adam to save another’s soul. No bishop, no priest, no ordained man of any church or denomination has power to forgive sins: no human absolution,<sup>9</sup> however solemnly conferred, can purge the conscience that is not purged by God. It is well to ask the counsel of the ministers of the Gospel when the conscience is perplexed. It is their office to help the laboring and heavy-laden and to show them the way of peace. But it is not in the power of any minister to deliver any man from his guilt. We can only show the path that must be followed; we can only point out the door at which everyone must knock. It requires a hand far stronger than that of man to take the chains off conscience and set the prisoner free. NO CHILD OF ADAM CAN TAKE AWAY HIS BROTHER’S SINS.

The bankrupt who asks a bankrupt to set him up in business again is only losing time. The pauper who travels off to a neighbor pauper and begs him to help him out of difficulties is only troubling himself in vain. The prisoner does not beg his fellow-prisoner to set him free; the shipwrecked sailor does not call on his shipwrecked comrade to place him safe ashore. Help in all these cases must come from some other quarter: relief in all these cases must be sought from some other hand. It is just the same in the matter of cleansing away your sins. So long as you seek it from man, whether man ordained or man not ordained, *you seek it where it cannot be found*...It is not in the power of any man on earth or in heaven to take

<sup>5</sup> **talents** – originally, a *talent* was a measure of weight, varying in size from country to country; it came to mean a large unit of money, varying in value with the metal involved, whether gold, silver, or copper.

<sup>6</sup> **amendments** – changes or corrections in behavior; self-reformation.

<sup>7</sup> **alms** – money or goods given to the poor, especially as a religious duty.

<sup>8</sup> **formality** – carefully observing religious duties.

<sup>9</sup> **absolution** – forgiveness of sins declared by church authority.

the burden of sin from off another man's soul. "None can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Psa 49:7).

Thousands in every age have tried to cleanse themselves from their sins in the ways I have now described and have tried in vain. Thousands, I doubt not, are trying at this very moment and find themselves "nothing bettered, but rather [growing] worse" (Mar 5:26). They are climbing up a steep precipice<sup>10</sup> of ice, toiling hard, and yet slipping backwards as fast as they climb. They are pouring water into a cask full of holes, laboring busily, and yet no nearer the end of their work than when they began. They are rowing a boat against a rapid stream, plying the oar diligently, and yet in reality losing ground every minute. They are trying to build up a wall of loose sand, wearing themselves out with fatigue, and yet seeing their work roll down on them as fast as they throw it up. They are striving to pump dry a sinking ship: the water gains on them, and they will soon be drowned. Such is the experience in every part of the world of all who think to cleanse themselves from their sins.

I warn every reader of this [article] to beware of quack medicines in religion. Beware of supposing that penitence, reformation, formality, and priestcraft<sup>11</sup> can ever give you peace with God. They cannot do it. It is not in them. The man who says they can must be ignorant of two things: he cannot know the length and breadth of human sinfulness; he cannot understand the height and depth of the holiness of God. There never breathed the man or woman on earth who tried to cleanse himself from his sins and in so doing obtained relief.

If you have found out this truth by experience, be diligent to impart it to others. Show them as plainly as you can their guilt and danger by nature. Tell them with no less plainness the immense importance of having their sins forgiven and cleansed away. But then warn them not to waste time in seeking to be cleansed in unlawful fashions...

**The [next] remark I have to make is this: *The blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse away all our sins.*** I enter on this part of my [article] with a thankful heart. I bless God that after setting before my readers the deadly nature of their spiritual disease, I am able to set before them an almighty remedy. But I feel it needful to dwell upon this remedy for a few minutes. A thing of such wondrous efficacy<sup>12</sup> as this "blood" ought to be clearly understood: there should be no vagueness or mystery in your ideas about it. When you hear of the "blood of Christ," you ought thoroughly to comprehend what the expression means.

The blood of Christ is that life-blood that the Lord Jesus shed when He died for sinners upon the cross. It is the blood that flowed so freely from His head pierced

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<sup>10</sup> **precipice** – a very sharply sloping cliff.

<sup>11</sup> **priestcraft** – the exercise of priestly functions.

<sup>12</sup> **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect; effectiveness.

with thorns, His hands and feet pierced with nails, and His side pierced with a spear in the day when He was crucified and slain. The quantity of that blood may very likely have been small. The appearance of that blood was doubtless like that of our own. But never since the day when Adam was first formed out of the dust of the ground has any blood been shed of such deep importance to the whole family of mankind.

**It was blood that had been *long covenanted and promised*.** In the day when sin came into the world, God mercifully engaged that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). One born of woman should appear one day and deliver the children of Adam from Satan's power. That Seed of the woman was our Lord Jesus Christ. In the day that He suffered on the cross, He triumphed over Satan and accomplished redemption for mankind. When Jesus shed His life-blood on the cross, the head of the serpent was bruised, and the ancient promise was fulfilled.

**It was blood that had been *long typified and prefigured*.** Every sacrifice that was offered up by patriarchs was a testimony of their faith in a greater sacrifice yet to come. Every shedding of the blood of lambs and goats under the Mosaic Law was meant to foreshadow the dying of the true Lamb of God for the sin of the world. When Christ was crucified, these sacrifices and types received their full accomplishment. The true sacrifice for sin was at length offered; the real atoning blood was at length shed. From that day, the offerings of the Mosaic Law were no longer needed. Their work was done. Like old almanacs, they might be laid aside for ever.

**It was blood that was of *infinite merit and value* in the sight of God.** It was not the blood of one who was nothing more than a singularly holy man, but of one Who was God's own "Fellow," very God of very God (Zec 13:7). It was not the blood of one who died involuntarily, as a martyr for truth, but of one Who voluntarily undertook to be the Substitute<sup>13</sup> and Proxy<sup>14</sup> for mankind, to bear their sins and carry their iniquities. It made atonement for man's transgressions; it paid man's enormous debt to God; it provided a way of righteous reconciliation between sinful man and his holy Maker; it made a road from heaven to earth, by which God could come down to man and show mercy; it made a road from earth to heaven by which man could draw near to God and yet not feel afraid. Without it, there could have been no remission of sin. Through it, God can be "just and yet the justifier" of the ungodly. From it, a fountain has been formed wherein sinners can wash and be clean to all eternity (Rom 3:26).

This wondrous blood of Christ applied to your conscience can cleanse you from all sin. It matters nothing what your sins may have been: "Though your sins be as

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<sup>13</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>14</sup> **Proxy** – a person appointed or authorized to act instead of another; substitute.

scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa 1:18). From sins of youth and sins of age, from sins of ignorance and sins of knowledge, from sins of open profligacy<sup>15</sup> and sins of secret vice, from sins against law and sins against Gospel, from sins of head, heart, tongue, thought, and imagination, from sins against each and all of the Ten Commandments—from *all* these the blood of Christ can set us free. To this end was it appointed; for this cause was it shed; for this purpose, it is still a fountain open to all mankind. That thing which you cannot do for yourself can be done in a moment by this precious fountain. YOU CAN HAVE ALL YOUR SINS CLEANSED AWAY.

*From Old Paths: Being Plain Statements of Some of the Weightier Matters of Christianity*, The Banner of Truth Trust, [www.banneroftruth.org](http://www.banneroftruth.org).

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**J. C. Ryle (1816-1900):** English Anglican Bishop and author; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, UK.



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<sup>15</sup> **profligacy** – shameless immorality.

# THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S DEATH

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

**O**F the nature and intention of Christ's sufferings, which terminated in His death, the human mind has indulged many wild and dangerous fancies. There are still men on earth who boldly deny that Jesus Christ endured the penalty of the Law in the room and stead of sinners, that the sins of any were imputed to Him, that He was a substitute for others,<sup>1</sup> or that His sufferings were strictly vicarious.<sup>2</sup> With very various degrees of ignorance or hatred of the truth, men reject all the established forms in which sound doctrine is taught. Yet all error is dangerous, and all truth is precious. The doctrine of the death of Christ holds a very prominent place in the Christian system. In fact, it is a central truth and demands our warmest love.

The common doctrine of the Christian world has been that our sins were imputed to Christ, that He bore the curse due to us for our transgressions, that He endured the penalty of the Law in our stead, that His sufferings were those of a substitute for guilty men. It has been the judgment of the people of God for ages on ages that this doctrine is well established in both the Old and the New Testaments.

**It is natural to inquire whether our Lord Himself explained the nature and object of His own death.** In the Gospels, we gain light on this point. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a *ransom* for many"<sup>3</sup> (Mat 20:28; <sup>4</sup> Mar 10:45). In full agreement with this declaration, Paul

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<sup>1</sup> See FGB 207, *Substitution*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>2</sup> **vicarious** – suffered by one person in the place of another.

<sup>3</sup> a **ransom for many** – There are three propositions that lie on the face of this declaration. (1) The work Jesus came to do was one of ransom. (2) The giving of His life was the ransom price. (3) This ransom price was substitutionary in character and design. It is this same idea, by the use of the same Greek root in different forms, that appears in most of the New Testament passages that deal with redemption. (John Murray, *The Atonement*, 21)

<sup>4</sup> **Matthew 20:28** – Shortly before His final entry into Jerusalem, Jesus responds to the request of James and John for special places of honor in the messianic kingdom. In contrasting greatness in the kingdom with greatness in this age, Jesus points to His own example when He states that "the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Although it is possible to take "many" as synonymous with "all," there are reasons to see a narrower reference. First, Jesus likely echoes the language of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, where the Servant dies on behalf of the many. Within that passage, the "many" refers to those to whom the saving work of the Servant is *actually* applied, including not only Jews but "many nations" (52:15) as well. Second, the language of ransom indicates the payment of a specific price (Jesus' life) for the release of a specific people (many). His life is given in exchange for that of the many, not for all without exception. (Matthew S. Harmon in David & Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 275-276)

says that Christ “gave himself a *ransom* for all to be testified in due season” (1Ti 2:6). The words translated *ransom* in these passages are not the same. One is *lytron*, “the price of redemption.” The other is *antilytron*,<sup>5</sup> which also signifies “ransom, the price of redemption”...His life was the price of our deliverance. It was all the price demanded. It was the ransom, the full ransom. Robinson’s definition of *lytron* is “*loosing-money, a ransom, the price paid for the release of any one.*” His definition of *antilytron* is “*an equivalent for redemption, i.e., a ransom.*” Christ paid the price for which many, who had been justly detained as prisoners to sin and death, are released.

Our Lord also said, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat 26:28).<sup>6</sup> Whose blood besides was ever shed for the same end? Isaiah, John the Baptist, Stephen, and many others died for the *truth*, but not for the remission of sins. In full accordance with this, Paul says that Christ “purged our sins” (Heb 1:3). “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22). Here is the reason why “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations” (Luk 24:47). Remission is by no “other name under heaven given among men” (Act 4:12). Not the blood of the prophets, of the martyrs, or of beasts, but *only* the blood of Christ secures the forgiveness of sins (Rev 1:5; Act 20:28; Heb 9:12).

Again, Christ says, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (Joh 10:11). “Great and good, just and holy, as He is, He saw His sheep about to perish in their wanderings; and in order to expiate<sup>7</sup> their guilt and to ransom them from destruction, He not only endured hardship and encountered

<sup>5</sup> λύτρον and ἀντίλυτρον – *lytron* (from 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. on) and *antilytron*...denote the means or money for a ransom. The suffix *-tron* denotes the instrument or means by which the action of the verb is accomplished, i.e., means of releasing or the payment, i.e., price of releasing. (*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 189-190)

<sup>6</sup> **Matthew 26:28** – During the Last Supper (26:26-29), Jesus offers the cup to His disciples and explains, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (26:28). Just as the sprinkling of blood sealed a particular people in the old covenant (Exo 24:1-8), so here the inauguration of the new covenant requires Jesus to shed His blood for a particular people. That particular people is the “many” for whom Jesus gives His life as a ransom (Matt. 20:28). The combination of “many” and “forgiveness of sins” here in 26:28 forges a link back to the angelic announcement in 1:21 that Jesus “will save his people from their sins.” Furthermore, this combination likely alludes again to the work of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Thus “his people” in Matthew 1:21 is further clarified by the “many” in 20:28 and 26:28 for whom Jesus dies to forgive their sins. As the fulfillment of the OT hope, Jesus seals the new covenant by ransoming a particular people from their bondage to sin through His death and resurrection. (Matthew S. Harmon in David & Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 276-277)

<sup>7</sup> **expiate** – to make satisfaction for an offense by which guilt is done away.

danger, but He ‘laid down his life for them,’ and in their stead!”<sup>8</sup> With the truths thus explicitly taught well agree all those general statements of Christ respecting His mission into this world, such as this, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10). He is the Savior. That is His name. The reason why He bears His name JESUS is that He saves His people *from* their sins (Mat 1:21).

The apostles and prophets give an account of the death of Christ every way coincident<sup>9</sup> with that given by the Lord Himself. Thus, Peter says, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1Pe 3:18). All suffering under the moral government of God is in some sense “for sins”—“Death by sin” (Rom 5:12). Some suffering is purely by way of condign<sup>10</sup> punishment. Thus, lost angels suffer for their own sins. Some suffering is disciplinary and is designed to wean men from error. Thus, the pious<sup>11</sup> Christian often suffers for his follies. Some suffering is exemplary.<sup>12</sup> Thus the old prophets often suffered (Jam 5:10). But the ground of their suffering was always *their own sins*. God never permitted a holy angel to be a sufferer. The wicked who are suffering the vengeance of eternal fire<sup>13</sup> are also an example to us, but they suffer justly for their own sins. The last kind of suffering for sin is expiatory, where “the just” suffers “for the unjust.” Christ in no sense suffered for Himself. In fact, the apostle in the next chapter says expressly, “Christ hath suffered *for* us in the flesh” (1Pe 4:1).

In like manner, the Scriptures generally and explicitly teach that Christ died *for* our sins. “He was delivered *for* our offences” (Rom 4:25). “He gave himself *for* our sins” (Gal 1:4). “Christ died *for* our sins according to the Scriptures” (1Co 15:3). No words could more clearly teach that Christ’s death was because of our offences against God, because of our rebellion against the Most High. The Word of God as clearly expresses the same truth in other language. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died *for* us” (Rom 5:8). “Christ died *for* the ungodly” (Rom 5:6). “This is my body, which is broken for you” (1Co 11:24). Here is substitution taught in the clearest terms. Christ died in the room and stead of us—sinners and ungodly.

By two different writers of Scripture, Christ is said to be the propitiation<sup>14</sup> for our sins. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments*, Vol. 5 (New York: Samuel T. Armstrong, and Crocker and Brewster, 1827), 525.

<sup>9</sup> **coincident** – matching point for point.

<sup>10</sup> **condign** – worthily deserved.

<sup>11</sup> **pious** – faithfully obedient and reverent to God; godly.

<sup>12</sup> **exemplary** – fit to serve as an example or pattern for imitation.

<sup>13</sup> See FGB 2011, *Hell*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>14</sup> **propitiation** – “Propitiation is that priestly work of Christ wherein He removed God’s anger and wrath by the covering over of our sins through the substitutionary sacrifice of Himself to God, thus

blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past" (Rom 3:25).<sup>15</sup> "He is the propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 2:2). "He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 4:10). In the above verses, it is not the same word in all places that is rendered propitiation. Paul's word is *hilasterion*; John's is *hilasmos*. They are, however, both correctly rendered *propitiation*, meaning an expiation<sup>16</sup> for sin.<sup>17</sup>

In full harmony with the foregoing, Paul says, "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Eph 5:2). All Christ did, He did "for us." In particular, when He offered Himself a *sacrifice*, it was not for Himself, but for us. He needed no expiation on His own account because He was holy and personally innocent. But just as surely as Abel's firstlings were sacrifices in his room and stead, so surely was Christ a sacrifice "for us." Accordingly, He is said to have "offered himself without spot to God" (Heb 9:14). So also, Christ is called "the lamb of God" (Joh 1:29) and "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1Pe 1:19). There is no significance in any bloody sacrifice unless the victim offered is a substitute for someone.

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securing our acceptance before God." (Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement*, 31) "In the use of this word, then, there is always understood, [1] An *offence*, crime, guilt, or debt, to be taken away; [2] A *person offended*, to be pacified, atoned, reconciled; [3] A *person offending*, to be pardoned, accepted; [4] A *sacrifice* or other means of making the atonement. (John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. 3, 476)

<sup>15</sup> **Romans 3:25** – The "propitiation" in view has a Godward focus (Rom 3:25). It is the counterpoint to Paul's extended exposition of the wrath of God being revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness (Rom 1:18-3:20). By nature, all have sinned, stand condemned, and face God's wrath. In Christ as propitiation, we who (with Saul/ Paul) were "children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:3) discover that He "delivers us from the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10). This propitiation is essential to all other aspects of Christ's atoning work. Neither kingly nor prophetic ministries can be effective without the priestly sacrifice. Since salvation is embodied in Christ, it becomes ours through Spirit-given faith-union with Him. (Sinclair Ferguson in David & Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, 610)

<sup>16</sup> **expiation** – Expiation has reference to the *guilt* of sin. To expiate is to remove or cover the guilt of sin. Propitiation has reference to the wrath or displeasure of God. To propitiate is to satisfy the divine justice and thus to appease His wrath. In the Biblical usage of the term, the justice of God is satisfied by the propitiatory sacrifice. (Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 382)

<sup>17</sup> Expiation means that the guilt of the sin needs to be removed. Expiation is the process in which you cancel the guilt of sin and purify the sinner from it...Are you clear as to the difference between expiation and propitiation? Propitiation carries this notion that there is Someone who has been offended, someone who has done the offending, that there is an offence, and that something is necessary on both sides. Something has got to be done from the side of the One who has been offended as well as from the side of the offender; and this great and glorious doctrine teaches us that the very God Whom we have offended has Himself proved the way whereby the offence has been dealt with. His anger, His wrath against sin and the sinner has been satisfied, appeased, and He therefore can now thus reconcile man unto Himself. (David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Chapters 3:20-4:25*, 73-78)



**Christ is also called our Surety**<sup>18</sup> (Heb 7:22). A surety binds himself to perform something for others, and this obligation is either absolute or conditional. If one is hopelessly insolvent,<sup>19</sup> the surety unconditionally assumes the payment of his debts. This was precisely our case. Our ruin was complete. We were utterly bankrupt, and Christ undertook to extricate<sup>20</sup> us, 1) by obeying the precept of the Law for us, and 2) by enduring the punishment due to us for our transgressions. In our helplessness, Christ pitied us, voluntarily and lovingly undertook our cause for us, was fully able to accomplish all He engaged to do, and did satisfy all the demands of the Law against us as rebels.

The Scriptures teach that Christ did all this. “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin” (1Jo 3:5). He took away our sins by taking them upon Himself. Accordingly, the Scriptures clearly assert that He “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” 1Pe 2:24. “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28)...Paul says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). If language has any force or meaning, this passage teaches that Christ has rescued His people from the penalty of the Law and that He did this by enduring the penalty in their room and stead. It is not probable that any man, who will deny that these words teach as much as is here supposed, would be profited by any teachings on the subject, whether from men or from heaven. The *curse* of the Law can mean nothing but the *penalty* of the Law. Christ’s being made a curse for us can mean nothing less than that He bore the penalty for us.

The Scriptures also expressly teach that Jesus Christ is the sole author of reconciliation between God and sinners, that by Him “we have received the atonement [or *reconciliation*]” (Rom 5:11); that we are “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom 5:10); and that God “hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2Co 5:18). Now, there is no way that the death of God’s Son could make reconciliation but by His satisfying divine justice in our place and stead. Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14)...

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<sup>18</sup> **Surety** – A surety is one that undertakes for one or more persons, whose credit is gone or is not good—one not to be trusted or whose faithfulness or ability is suspected. Now, my brethren, when man [*Adam*] had broken the law of the first covenant [*in the Garden*], his credit was gone or lost forever. God would not enter into covenant anymore with him without a Surety, knowing man’s inability and unfaithfulness in his fallen estate. Therefore, [*He*] was graciously pleased to provide for us, or in our behalf, a... Surety. By so much was Jesus made a Surety of a better covenant (Heb 7:22): As Christ engaged to God for us to satisfy for our sins and to bring us into a state of grace and peace with God, [to] preserve us in that state to the end, and to give security to the Covenant of Peace, which He is a Surety of, He is called a Surety...Had not our Mediator engaged in this Covenant of Peace and Redemption for us, there had been no covenant *nor* peace for us at all because all dependeth on Christ’s Suretyship. (Benjamin Keach, *The Display of God’s Glorious Grace*, 88)

<sup>19</sup> **insolvent** – unable to meet financial obligations.

<sup>20</sup> **extricate** – set free from a state of difficulty.

As our Savior was a voluntary Surety, there was no injustice in requiring of Him the satisfaction due from us. So true and so old is the doctrine that our Lord suffered [as] the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty, that to this day we have no better means of illustrating the whole method of pardon and acceptance than by a simple explanation of many of the types, and especially the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The doctrine of the imputation of the sin of one to the person of another is as old as the institution of shedding blood in solemn worship and slaying victims at earthly altars...

Beware of self-conceit; beware of all opinions on the subject of the atonement unless you can prove them by the tenor of Scripture...Jesus Christ made satisfaction for all the sins of all His people...He paid the last farthing of the debt they owed to the broken Law and injured government of God, and in Him they are complete and have full redemption.

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[www.sprinklepublications.net](http://www.sprinklepublications.net).

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**William S. Plumer (1802-1880):** American Presbyterian minister and author; born in Greensburg, PA, USA.



# CHRIST'S PRIESTLY ACTION

Hugh Martin (1822-1885)

**T**HE fundamental notion and essence of atonement, as embodied in the priestly work of Christ, is the offering of Himself unto God [as] a sacrifice and a reconciliation for the sins of His people. It is His substitutionary oblation of Himself, bearing the curse and bringing in righteousness, thereby satisfying Divine justice and reconciling us unto God...But now:

Is the action of Priesthood real action—not mere suffering or endurance, but *real* action, and that action, *offering*?<sup>2</sup> Then, without bringing out the nature of this action more fully—without even asking what the exact and intrinsic<sup>1</sup> nature of this action is—we may see that it bears very powerfully, though perhaps not so patently,<sup>2</sup> upon all the false theories [of atonement]...Their advocates contemplate Christ's death not as action, but exclusively as suffering: it is a providential event to which Christ is subjected, not a *priestly action* that Christ achieves. They recognize His passive endurance, not His priestly agency. They see that He *suffered*; they see not that He *offered*...

Did Christ merely *suffer* in His death? Was His own *agency*<sup>3</sup> not concerned in it? Then, was He not a Priest on Calvary, but merely a Lamb? If so, the question at once arises, “Who offered up this Lamb of God, the eternal Son of God, a sacrifice upon the cross?” Either the Father or the Spirit was the Priest, neither of Whom was ever “taken from among men” or “ordained for men...that he may offer” (Heb 5:1); or there *was* no Priest. For assuredly no creature could be admitted to the honor of offering up the only begotten of the Father. In any case, in this view, Christ's death occurred outside His Priesthood. If *that* is true, His death can be nothing to us.

**I refuse to believe in the cross of Christ as a mere passive endurance.** And I refuse to discuss the doctrine of His death under any such restriction of its marvelous, [singular], and transcendent glory. I deny that His God-glorifying agency was overborne<sup>4</sup> before He died, leaving Him a mere victim to causes and means of death, aside from His own active will and power offering Him to God. I deny that on His cross all His duty turned at last into patience and became negation. It was His *duty* to die, and He discharged His duty...Christ *acted* in dying. It was His duty to die—His official duty. Official action was in it: priestly agency. He dismissed

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<sup>1</sup> **intrinsic** – belonging to something as a basic and essential feature of what it is.

<sup>2</sup> **patently** – obviously; evidently.

<sup>3</sup> **agency** – action; exertion of power.

<sup>4</sup> **overborne** – overpowered; overcome.

His Spirit (Joh 19:30). He “gave himself” (Gal 1:4; 2:20; Eph 5:25; 1Ti 2:6; Ti 2:14). Herein is His love: herein also is His power—herein the triumph and transcendent glory of His victory over death. He is an unquelled,<sup>5</sup> unconquered, conquering agent in offering Himself up to God.

It is true He suffers—the just for the unjust. Men are killing Him, and Satan [is] tempting and tormenting Him. The Father bruises Him: “It pleased the LORD to bruise him” (Isa 53:10) and to say, “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd” (Zec 13:7). He *endures* the cross. He suffers death. He dies a sufferer. So much the more wondrous is the truth that He [is] a conquering agent in dying. He trembles, but He does not faint. He does not swoon, but agonize. And “*agony*” is *action* to the uttermost. This is the glory of His triumph! Leave this out of view—put aside His priestly agency and priestly action in His death—suppose His agency and action to have been, ere death, exhausted, leaving room for passive sufferance and patience *merely*, and *you cannot “glory in the Cross,”* nor teach the Church of God to glory in it. You leave the glory of Christ’s triumph and the evidence of Christ’s love deeply buried in the shame of Calvary and in the grave of Golgotha...If [Jesus] died a mere passive victim, He did not die a victor; and no subsequent glory can redeem what in that case was defeat. But He died a triumphant agent! He prevailed against death to live until He said, “It is finished” (Joh 19:30), and then to die, not merely voluntarily, but by positive priestly action, giving Himself to God.

The Cross *itself* is glorious: not from the subsequent resurrection and enthronement, but glorious from *itself*...Christ crucified is—not after, but *in* being crucified—the power of God. And He is the *power* of God because He is the *Priest* of God. It is His priestly duty to die—a duty unparalleled and unapproachable. He falters not in the discharge of it. Official agency is in His sacrificial priestly death. He *offered* Himself (Heb 9:14). “[He] loved the church, and *gave* himself for it” (Eph 5:25)...

**We lay it down that the doctrine of the atonement ought not to be discussed apart from the idea of Christ’s priestly action in His death.** We are deeply persuaded that the refusal to discuss or contemplate the doctrine of Christ’s death, except as that priestly *action* that Holy Scripture abundantly reveals it to have been—while it is obviously the most effective method of establishing and defending the doctrine itself—is at the same time the true way to take legitimate and conclusive preliminary objection to the vast majority of false representations of Christ’s death...Holy Scripture is so clear, so abundant, so express, varied, and emphatic in its assertions of Christ’s death being a transaction in which His own agency was concerned that those who deny this or make no account of it cannot be

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<sup>5</sup> **unquelled** – not suppressed, crushed, or overcome.

considered as merely erring in scriptural interpretation, but must be regarded as rejecting Scripture as the rule of faith...

**Reasons why this truth has been much overlooked...** We are so familiar with the plain statement that Christ was at once the Sacrifice and the Priest—"he offered up himself" (Heb 7:27)—that we think we have fully mastered its contents, while we may have done little more than skim the surface.

That it must contain great depths of truth should be obvious from the fact that it presents a consideration absolutely unparalleled, singular,<sup>6</sup> and unique. That the man Christ Jesus should both suffer death—and *such a death*, under the curse of the divine Law, with all conceivable aggravations of woe, agony, and shame—and also that He should sinlessly, yea, obediently and officially have an active hand in His death, and *such a death*—ought at once to strike us as passing all comprehension. [It is] entitled to that thoughtful, prolonged, and reverent contemplation that might enable us, under the teaching of the Spirit of truth, to place the fact before our understandings with the most exact accuracy of thought we can attain and with the fullest completeness that we can grasp... That "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1Co 15:3), [many] are content to believe. But that in this transaction of the death at Calvary, He combined the two apparently antagonistic attitudes of suffering and offering—*suffering* unto such extent and such intensity as would have quelled all the active powers, not to say the patience, of any but a Divine person; and *offering*, also in such activity and such unquelled and excelling triumphant action, as if no suffering were making drain upon His active powers at all. This is the apparent paradox in the death of Christ that many, we fear, have far too lightly considered. Yet, how, without profound consideration and appreciating admiration of it, they can intelligently "glory in the Cross," it is impossible to see.

That the simple but profound truth on which we are desirous of insisting should have been, at least to some extent, overlooked by many whose views of the Atonement are not incorrect, may in some measure be easily accounted for... Several phrases have acquired a [general use] unfavorable to clearness and comprehensiveness. Among these we may notice what we have long thought the unhappy and not very intelligible expression—"Christ's active and passive obedience." No doubt, with explanations, the phrase may be allowed. And without question, it is with these explanations that sound writers have used it. It has been employed to express the fact that in Christ's life and death as our Surety, there meet the endurance of the penalty of the Law and the inbringing of a positive righteousness... Moreover, if there is anything in Christ's [intervention] for our salvation that may be supposed to be called "passive" obedience—as in express contradiction to "active" obedience—it must be His death. And where this impression pre-

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<sup>6</sup> **singular** – forming the only one of the kind.

vails, it obviously countenances and indeed suggests the idea that His death was *exclusively* passive—that His own activity or agency is not to be recognized in it...

The Paraphrase also—the forty-fourth—which represents “the pale ensigns” of death as overspreading the cheeks and the “trembling lips” of our Lord, while life *forsook* “His closing eyes and His drooping head,” does most manifest injustice to the condition of our Lord's Person on the cross and is clearly most injurious to the scriptural representations that “Jesus cried with a loud voice” and “gave up the ghost” (Mar 15:37)—*dismissed* His Spirit. The impression that such phrases are fitted to make upon the mind is just this and nothing more: our Lord un murmuringly *endured* inconceivable sufferings; He was being *subjected* to death as the penalty due to sin. *All that is true*. But they also suggest the idea that whereas formerly He had been engaged in *positive* duty, going about doing good, the time for positive and active duty was now passed. The time for simply suffering had come.

We must never cease to affirm that this representation of the cross is most inadequate. It exhibits the cross as the emblem and scene of patience *merely*, while it conceals those glorious and glorifying aspects of it in which it is seen to be an altar of priestly agency, a throne of powerful action, and a chariot of victory and triumph. It represents Christ's activity as subdued and overborne, or at least as [temporarily stopped]. It [leaves out] the grand consideration—which direct Scriptural assertions place before us and which an adoring appreciation of the constitution of Christ's Person and the intrinsic nature of His work necessitate—that Christ's actual putting forth of power and His official, obedient, and positive agency, *never were and could not be* overborne and subdued...Earth, hell, and heaven: earth's rulers and her rabble; her kings, priests, soldiers, and malefactors assailed Him; her Jews and Gentiles; even her dumb creatures; earth's forests furnishing wood; earth's streams refusing water; earth's bitternesses mingled in vinegar and gall; earth's curse embodied in her thorns, in mockery and pain to crown Him; earth's founded steadfastness refused to support Him and her firmament to shine upon Him; hell's utmost force and fury gathered up against Him; heaven's sword devoured Him and heaven's God forsook Him—earth, hell, and heaven conspired against Him unto the uttermost of heaven's most extreme justice and earth and hell's most extreme injustice—what is the glory of the Cross, if it be not *this*: with such action conspiring to subdue *His* action, His action outlasted and outlived them all! He did not die subdued and overborne into dying; *He did not die until He gave Himself in death!* Emmanuel a mere sufferer in His death? “The preaching of the cross...is the *power* of God” (1Co 1:18).

**Direct scriptural evidence of this truth:** We may notice briefly some of the more obvious scriptural assertions of this truth...Among some of the more obvious testimonies to the doctrine that the death of Christ was an *action* of His priestly office may be reckoned the assertion of Isaiah: “He hath *poured out* his soul unto

death” (53:12). The phrases frequently used by the Apostle Paul: “Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it” (Eph 5:25); and, specializing this love and loving service to the individual believer, He “loved me, and *gave himself* for me” (Gal 2:20). Again, “Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an *offering* and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (Eph 5:2). And again, “When he had *by himself purged* our sins” (Heb 1:2). The doxology of John: “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5). The frequent expressions of the Lord Himself: “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to *minister*, and to *give* his life a ransom for many” (Mat 20:28). And, very specially, His ever memorable account of Himself as the Good Shepherd: “The good shepherd *giveth* his life for the sheep” (Joh 10:11). So [concerned] is our Lord on this point that He repeats it again and again in the strongest and most emphatic terms, positive and negative alike: “No man taketh it from me, but I *lay it down* of myself” (Joh 10:18). And so powerfully does He bring out the idea of His own agency being concerned in His death that He places it on a level with the agency He should put forth in His resurrection! [He] represents obedient action equally in the two cases as constituting jointly what His Father’s commandment had enjoined upon Him and what His Father’s love and approbation rested in so complacently: “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I *lay down* my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself”—*at My own instance, of My own will, by My own deed*—“I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I of my Father” (John 10:17-18). How clearly is the putting forth of positive power implied in all these various expressions!...“Nor yet that he should *offer* himself often...For then must he often have *suffered* since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin *by the sacrifice of himself*” (Heb 9:25-26)—an utterance of inspiration that fearlessly presents the sacrifice of the Cross as an *offering in suffering* and as *suffering in offering*, doing justice alike to both aspects of the truth, together constituting one truth indissoluble, its unique singularity arising from a combination of what, *in none but the God-man*, could be combined.

We speak of His “doing” and His “dying.” His dying was His *grandest* doing. The light and evidence of His *active* obedience, instead of paling on the Cross, shines out there most brilliantly of all, shining down the darkness of death, and of the frown of incensed justice, until the dark frown passes off from the face of the Eternal Judge, and the light of a Father’s countenance is lifted on the obedient Son in the moment of His saying, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luk 23:46). The Father’s will is done. It is done by the Eternal Son, through the Eternal Spirit. Consentient<sup>7</sup> actings of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost fill the death

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<sup>7</sup> **consentient** – united in opinion; unanimous.

of Christ with action and with power unparalleled and transcendent; and the [preaching] of the cross is the power of God.

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www.banneroftruth.org.

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**Hugh Martin (1822-1885)**: Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian; born in Aberdeen, Scotland.



The doctrine of Redemption is one of the most important doctrines of the system of faith. A mistake on this point will inevitably lead to a mistake through the entire system of our belief.—*Charles Spurgeon*



# CHRIST'S PROPITIATION

John Murray (1898-1975)

**T**HE language of propitiation is clearly applied to the work of Christ in the New Testament (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1Jo 2:2; 4:10). Plausible<sup>1</sup> attempts have been made to interpret propitiation in terms of expiation and thus avoid the *prima facie*<sup>2</sup> import of propitiation. The fallacy of these attempts has been successfully demonstrated by scholarly and painstaking study of the biblical data...The reason for the attempt to relieve the work of Christ of its strictly propitiatory character is obvious. To propitiate means "to pacify, to conciliate,<sup>3</sup> to make propitious.<sup>4</sup>" It presupposes that the person propitiated is angry and needs to be pacified. If Christ propitiates, it must be God *Whom* He propitiates. And surely, it is alleged, we cannot think of God as needing to be pacified or made propitious by the blood of Christ. If the atonement springs from the love of the Father and is the provision of His love, is it not contradiction to maintain that He is conciliated by that which is the expression of His love? If invincible love is antecedent, then no place remains for the pacifying of wrath!

There is deplorable confusion in this line of reasoning. To love and to be propitious are not convertible terms. Even in the human sphere, the unique object of love may at the same time be the unique object of holy wrath and displeasure. It is the denial of God's holiness in relation to sin, as the contradiction of what He is and demands, not to recognize that sin must evoke His wrath. And just as sin belongs to persons, so the wrath rests upon the persons who are the agents of sin. Those whom God loved with invincible love were the children of wrath, as Paul expressly says (Eph 2:3). It is to this fact that the propitiation made by Christ is directed. Those whom God loved were the children of His wrath. This truth enhances the marvel of His love; and if we deny it or tone it down, we have eviscerated<sup>5</sup> the greatness of His love. The doctrine of the propitiation is precisely this: God loved the objects of His wrath so much that He gave His own Son to the end that He by His blood should make provision for the removal of this wrath. It was Christ's to deal with the wrath so that those loved would no longer be the objects of wrath, and love would achieve its aim of making the children of wrath the children of God's good pleasure...

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<sup>1</sup> **plausible** – seeming reasonable or probable.

<sup>2</sup> ***prima facie*** – based on the first impression; accepted as correct until proved otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> **conciliate** – stop someone from being angry; pacify.

<sup>4</sup> **propitious** – favorably disposed toward someone.

<sup>5</sup> **eviscerated** – removed the essential content of.

The disposition to deny or even underrate the doctrine of propitiation betrays a bias that is prejudicial to the atonement as such. The atonement means that Christ bore our sins and in bearing sin bore its judgment (*cf.* Isa 53:5). Death itself is the judgment of God upon sin (*cf.* Rom 5:12; 6:23). And Christ died for no other reason than that death is the wages of sin. But the epitome of the judgment of God upon sin is His wrath. If Jesus in our place met the whole judgment of God upon our sin, He must have endured that which constitutes the essence of this judgment. How superficial is the notion that the vicarious endurance of wrath is incompatible with the immutable love of the Father to Him! Of course, the Father loved the Son with unchangeable and infinite love. And the discharge of the Father's will in the extremities of Gethsemane's agony and the abandonment of Calvary elicited the supreme delight of the Father (*cf.* Joh 10:17). But love and wrath are not contradictory; love and hatred are. It is only because Jesus was the Son, loved immutably as such, and loved increasingly in His messianic capacity as He progressively fulfilled the demands of the Father's commission, that He could bear the full stroke of judicial wrath. This is inscribed on the most mysterious utterance that ever ascended from earth to heaven, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psa 22:1; Mat 27:46; Mar 15:34). God in our nature forsaken of God! Here is the wonder of the Father's love and of the Son's love, too. Eternity will not scale its heights or fathom its depths. How pitiable is the shortsightedness that blinds us to its grandeur and that fails to see the necessity and glory of the propitiation. "Herein is love," John wrote, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son a propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 4:10). Christ is truly the propitiation for our sins because He propitiated the wrath that was our damnation. The language of propitiation may not be diluted: it bespeaks the essence of Calvary.

From *The Atonement*, used with permission of P&R Publishing,  
P O Box 817, Phillipsburg, N.J. 08865, [www.prpbooks.com](http://www.prpbooks.com).

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**John Murray (1898-1975):** Reformed theologian; author of numerous books and articles; born in Badbea, Sutherland County, Scotland.



# CHRIST'S ATONING BLOOD

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

*The precious blood of Christ.—1 Peter 1:19*

IT would seem impossible by any illustration or argument to over-estimate the intrinsic value of Christ's atoning blood. There are some things in religion of which we may entertain a too exalted and exaggerated conception. For example, we may have too high a view of the Church of Christ, exalting it above Christ Himself. We may hold too exaggerated and too exclusive views of Church ordinances, displacing and magnifying them, substituting their observance for vital religion for a change of heart, for faith in Christ exclusively for justification. But no such danger lies in our study of the blood of Christ. Here our views cannot be too high, our contemplation too profound, our hearts too loving and adoring.

Consider for a moment, beloved, the ends that were accomplished by the shedding of Christ's blood. We often estimate the value of a mean by the end it secures. The atonement of Christ was to meet the claims of God's moral government. By man's sin, its holiness had been invaded, its authority contemned,<sup>1</sup> its sanctions, laws, and commands outraged. Over all its glory, a cloud had passed. God's eternal purpose was to save man. But He could save him only by an expedient<sup>2</sup> that would remove that cloud and cause the glory it shaded to shine forth with deeper and more resplendent<sup>3</sup> luster. The expedient that would thus meet the claims of the divine government must be divine.

The atonement that would link justice with mercy and holiness with love, in the salvation of the Church, must be infinite in its character and priceless in its worth. Such, in a few words, were the two grand ends to be secured and which were secured by the offering up of the Lord Jesus Christ. Viewed only in this light, how precious does the blood of Christ appear! Blood that could harmonize the divine attributes—uphold the righteousness of the divine government, making it honorable and glorious in God to save sinful man—must be precious.

It is precious blood because it is virtually the "blood of God." This is a strong but a scriptural expression. Paul, in his parting address to the Ephesian elders, employs it: "...the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Act 20:28).<sup>4</sup> This [is what] stamps the atoning blood of the Savior with such dig-

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<sup>1</sup> **contemned** – treated with contempt.

<sup>2</sup> **expedient** – a means to an end.

<sup>3</sup> **resplendent** – shining, brilliant, and splendid.

<sup>4</sup> [EDITOR'S NOTE]: Our sovereign God is eternal spirit and does not have human blood. However, "In Acts 20:28, the God-man is called 'God,' and human characteristics are attributed, namely, blood

nity and virtue—it is the blood of Jehovah-Jesus. It possesses all the worth and glory of the Godhead—all the divine virtue and efficacy of the Deity. From this, it derived its power to satisfy, its virtue to atone, its efficacy<sup>5</sup> to cleanse. And this is the reason why *one drop* of this precious blood, falling upon a sin-burdened conscience, in a moment dissolves the weighty load and fills the soul with joy and peace in believing. And this is why there exists not a stain of human guilt that the atoning blood of Immanuel cannot utterly and forever efface.<sup>6</sup> Why, in a word, it is blood that “cleanseth from ALL sin” (1Jo 1:7).

But it follows that it is the blood of a pure and sinless *humanity*, and this by no means lessens our idea of its preciousness. A deep mystery, we admit, is the incarnation of God.<sup>7</sup> But...let us go to Bethlehem and see this great sight—not to reason, but believe; not to fathom, but adore. How great the folly of man in his endeavor to sound the depths of God's infinity! Here, then, exists an essential element of preciousness in Christ's blood: it flowed from arteries untouched, untainted by the virus of sin, from a humanity upon which not a breath of pollution had fallen. He knew no sin (2Co 5:21). Begotten by the Holy Ghost, He was that “holy thing” born of a virgin (Luk 1:35). “Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26)—He came into the world, lived in it, died in it, and left it as pure and immaculate<sup>8</sup> as the Deity He enshrined. His Godhead wore not the tainted fleece, was clad not in the leprous garment of our fallen, apostate, and sinful nature. A holy Savior offered up a sinless atonement for unholy, sinful man. Hence the *preciousness* of His blood.

Look at it, beloved, in this light; and let your hearts glow with love, adoration, and praise, as you kneel before the cross and feel the distilling upon your conscience of that blood, which pardons, covers, cancels all your guilt. From this view of the essential preciousness of Christ's blood, let us consider *its preciousness to God*.

The minute directions that God gave concerning [the law of the Levitical era] marked the sacredness and significance of blood in His holy eyes. Can we for a moment suppose that the blood of the Atonement offered upon the cross of Calvary should not be of yet more infinite worth and preciousness to God? Beloved...we

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and the pains of death. ‘Feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.’ The term *God* here denotes incarnate God...In this use, the ecclesiastical phrase *God's blood* is proper.” (Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 650)

<sup>5</sup> **efficacy** – power to produce a desired effect; effectiveness.

<sup>6</sup> **efface** – blot out; pardon.

<sup>7</sup> **incarnation** – (Latin: *incarnatio* “taking on flesh”); “The act whereby the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, without ceasing to be what He is, God the Son, took into union with Himself what He before that act did not possess, a human nature, ‘and so [He] was and continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person, forever’ (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 21).” (Walter Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 601)

<sup>8</sup> **immaculate** – spotless; undefiled; in the case of Christ, free from original sin.

shall find in the hour of death this to be the most essential, supporting, and comforting—the preciousness and acceptableness to God of that divine sacrifice for sin upon which, in that awful moment, we are relying—to know then that God is well pleased with that blood upon which, as a poor, guilty sinner about to appear in eternity, we rest; and that in *its* acceptance, *we* are accepted. By its virtue, we are washed whiter than snow; and...through its merit we shall appear before God in righteousness—surely, with this truth witnessed to by the Holy Ghost in our souls, death will have no sting, and the grave no terror.

The atoning blood of Christ must be precious to the Father because it is the blood of His own Son. There was an essential, close, and endearing relation between the Victim and the Offerer. Is the blood of a child precious to the heart of a parent? Thus precious was the blood of Jesus to God. Oh, methinks, if ever God loved His Son, He loved Him *then!* Gazing from His throne in glory upon the awful scene on earth, He saw the Son Who dwelt in His bosom from eternity, impaled upon the accursed tree, suffering the just for the unjust, vindicating the rectitude<sup>9</sup> of His government, and pouring out His holy soul unto death that He might bring us unto God.

But there was not only the yearning of parental affection in God, but in the sacrifice of His beloved Son. He beheld the salvation of His Church fully and forever secured. In that vital stream, He saw the life, the spiritual and eternal life, of His people. His everlasting love had found a fit and appropriate channel through which it could flow to the vilest sinner...And when God raised His Son from the grave, exalted Him to glory, set Him at His own right hand, and then sent down the Holy Spirit, the seal of His acceptance was affixed to His own deep sense of the preciousness of Christ's blood. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 4:10). Trembling soul, I approach this atonement. God has accepted it—will not you? Surely, you may with confidence and hope rely upon that sacrifice with which He has thus declared Himself well pleased. You cannot come to it too hopefully, nor rely upon it too implicitly, nor believe in it too simply, nor rejoice in it too fervently. It is precious to God; and in virtue of its preciousness, your person is precious, your prayers are precious, your offerings of love are precious—fragrant to Him as "the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed" (Gen 27:27). Plead but the precious blood of Christ for renewed forgiveness, urge it as your argument in prayer, and draw from it your motive to self-surrender as a holy, living sacrifice to God; and you shall not fail of acceptance with the Holy One.

But there is another view of our subject that illustrates the endearing character of Christ's blood. It is not only precious to God, but it is also *precious in the experience of the believer*. God will make precious to His people [what] is precious to

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<sup>9</sup> **rectitude** – moral uprightness.

Himself. He will endear to their hearts that which is dear to His own. It is precious to the saints because it is the blood of their Great High Priest. There was no personal relation between the sacrifice and the priest under the Levitical dispensation. But...we see in the blood of Christ the blood of one Who stands to us in the varied and tender relations of a priest, a shepherd, a friend, a brother, a kinsman, a redeemer. Oh, to travel to the cross and behold in that illustrious Sufferer, one Who combined in Himself every endearing, tender, and precious relation. It was no stranger Who hung there...It was our Elder Brother, our [Redeemer], our Friend. How precious, then, to our penitent, believing, loving hearts must that blood be! With what reverence should we speak of it, with what faith should we trust in it, with what gratitude we should welcome it, and with what holiness of life should we show forth its praise!

As all His salvation, it must possess an indescribable preciousness to the believer. There is no salvation for the soul but in the atoning blood of Immanuel. Whatever else presents itself as such is a delusion and a snare. Baptism is nothing here. Sacraments are nothing here. Priestly power is nothing here. Works of human merit are nothing here. The blood of Christ—God's own expedient—stands unrivalled and alone, the *only* hope of a lost sinner. The teaching and authority of God's Word are decisive and ultimate on this momentous and vital point. Christ's sacrifice is declared to be a "propitiation through faith in His blood" (Rom 3:25); "Being justified by His blood" (Rom 5:9); "We have redemption through His blood" (Eph 1:7); "That He might sanctify the people with His own blood" (Heb 13:12); "Who hath washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Rev 1:5); "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God" (Rev 7:14). In these declarations...is inscribed the great essential truth—**SALVATION ALONE BY THE ATONING BLOOD OF CHRIST.**

This is the "Stone" that is set at naught by all who seek some other way to heaven—who build their hope upon the sand—a way the end of which is death. But "neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:12). Before the power and glory of this one precious name, every false religion shall vanish; and to it, every knee shall bow. Around a dying bed, the scaffolding of all ecclesiastical systems falls, leaving the man who has reposed his all upon it to his ghostly hope. But to that departing soul, to whom the savor, power, and preciousness of the name of JESUS is as ointment shedding its fragrance round the room where disease and death with united force are battling with life, oh how supporting, soothing, and hope-inspiring is the precious blood of Christ, which is felt at that awful moment, when the transgressions of a life crowd upon memory, to cleanse from *all* sin!...

[This] is not the least precious view to the saints of God of the atoning blood of Christ, which this [article] presents—*viz.*, *its voice and power in heaven*. It is a delightful, sanctifying truth: the pleading of the blood within the veil that now separates the saints of the Most High on earth from the glory of the upper and inner sanctuary. Our great High Priest hath passed within that veil [and] has entered into that sanctuary, bearing in His hands the blood He shed on Calvary. And with that blood—basing His intercession upon its divine and changeless efficacy—He pleadeth for the Church with an individual, momentary, and ceaseless intercession...

Here, then, blood is one of the precious things of God: most precious Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, enveloped in the incense-cloud of His merits, praying for you with a ceaseless and successful advocacy. Amidst your trials and toils, your temptations and sins, your wants and woes, your fears and tremblings, the voice of Immanuel's blood speaks for you in heaven, and that voice is echoed back to earth in the succorings, upholdings, and soothings, in the strength, grace, and love that its pleadings secure for you below.

What a balm for *the sin-distressed conscience* is the precious blood of Christ! There grows not in the universe another tree whose [balm] can heal the wounded conscience but this Tree of Life—a crucified Savior. *O beware, beloved reader, of a false healing!*... There is no [balm] for a wounded conscience but that which exudes from the wounds of Christ... Is not this the especial office and gracious mission of Jesus? Listen to His precious words: “He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted” (Luk 4:18). Oh, the luxury of a broken heart for sin thus soothed, bound up, and healed by “the precious blood of Christ!” Who would not cry, “Lord, subdue, break, dissolve my heart for sin! Let its grief be never so deep, [distressing], and bitter, may it but be brought into contact with the virtue, peace, and preciousness of Thy most precious blood”? Again, we beseech you: beware of a *spurious* healing! Remember, no tear can heal a wounded conscience; no confession can heal it; no sacrament can heal it; no minister can heal it. Nothing in this wide universe can heal it but the precious atoning blood of Christ. *That* can heal it in one moment. It can efface, not only the faintest breath of guilt from the troubled conscience, but it can wash out the deepest, darkest, foulest blot of sin that ever existed upon the human soul... Will you, then, hesitate to believe?...

Are you approaching the solemnities of a dying hour? Oh, turn you now from everything but the precious blood of Christ! Let go every object but the cross. Relax your hold of churches and creeds, duties and ordinances, ministers and saints, and let *one object* absorb every thought, feeling, and desire—filling the entire scope of the brief and solemn space that now divides time from eternity—THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST! Cast yourself upon it in simple believing. Look at it

with the feeblest, dimmest eye of faith, and it will speak pardon, peace, and joy to your soul, unveiling to your departing spirit a hope radiant with immortality.

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**Octavius Winslow (1808-1878):** Nonconformist pastor; born in London, England, raised in New York, buried in Abbey Cemetery, Bath, UK.





# CHRIST'S REDEMPTION

John Murray (1898-1975)

**N**O category is inscribed more deeply upon the consciousness of the Church of Christ than that of redemption. No song of the saints is more characteristic than the praise of redemption by Jesus' blood: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev 5:9).

**Redemption views the atonement from its own distinctive aspect.** *Sacrifice* views the atonement from the perspective of guilt, *propitiation* from that of wrath, *reconciliation* from that of alienation. Redemption has in view the *bondage* to which sin has consigned us, and it views the work of Christ not simply as deliverance from bondage but in terms of *ransom*. The word of our Lord settles this signification: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a *ransom* for many" (Mat 20:28; cf. Mar 10:45). There are three propositions that lie on the face of this declaration. (1) The work Jesus came to do was one of ransom. (2) The giving of His life was the ransom price. (3) This ransom price was substitutionary in character and design. It is this same idea, by the use of the same Greek root in different forms, that appears in most of the New Testament passages that deal with redemption (Luk 1:68; 2:38; 24:21; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1Ti 2:6; Ti 2:14; Heb 9:12, 15; 1Pe 1:18). In some other passages, a different term is used. But it likewise conveys the thought of purchase (1Co 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5; 2Pe 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3-4). Hence, the language of redemption is that of *securing release by the payment of a price*; and it is this concept that is applied expressly to the laying down of Jesus' life and the shedding of His blood. Jesus shed His blood in order to pay the price of our ransom. Redemption cannot be reduced to lower terms.

Since the word of our Lord (Mat 20:28; Mar 10:45) sets the points for the doctrine of redemption, and since He represented the giving of His life as the ransom price, we are prepared for the emphasis that falls upon the *blood* of Christ as the medium of redemptive accomplishment. "We have redemption through his blood" (Eph 1:7; cf. Col 1:14). "Ye were redeemed," Peter says, "not with corruptible things such as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ" (1Pe 1:18-19). It is through His own blood that Jesus entered once for all into the [holy place], having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:12). And Jesus as the Mediator of the new covenant brought His death to bear upon the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant (Heb 9:15). The new song of the redeemed is, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" (Rev 5:9). We cannot doubt, then, that when Paul says, "Ye were bought with a price"

(1Co 6:20; 7:23), the price is none other than *the priceless blood of Christ*...There can be no question, then, but the death of Christ in all its implications as the consequence of His vicarious identification with our sins is that which redeems—and redeems in the way that is required by and appropriate to the redemptive concept, namely, by *ransom price*. That from which we are represented as being released intimates the bondage that redemption has in view. As we might expect, there are several respects in which this bondage is to be construed.<sup>1</sup> This diversity of aspect and the corresponding manifold of virtue belonging to the death of Christ are borne out by the witness of Scripture.

**1. Redemption from *sin*** That deliverance or salvation from *sin* is basic in the saving action of Christ needs no demonstration. It is sufficient to be reminded that this is the meaning of the name “Jesus” (Mat 1:21). And the title “Savior” is that by which He is frequently identified—He is the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The saving action comprehends much more than is expressly specified in the term *redemption*. All of the categories in which the atonement is defined sustain a direct relation to sin and its liabilities. And, apart from express statements to this effect, we should have to understand that, if redemption contemplates our bondage and secures release by ransom, the bondage must have in view that arising from sin...Though the relation to our sins is not as expressly stated, it is equally implied when redemption through Jesus’ blood is defined as “the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph 1:7; *cf.* Col 1:14)...Since the reference to sin is overt in these passages, we are compelled to infer that in others where sin is not mentioned, it is, nevertheless, the assumed liability making redemption necessary and giving character to it (*cf.* Rom 3:24; 1Ti 2:6; Heb 9:12)...The bondage that sin entails for us is threefold: guilt, defilement, and power. All three aspects come within the scope of the redemption wrought by Christ. It would not be feasible<sup>2</sup> to dissociate any of these aspects from the passages that reflect on Jesus’ redemptive accomplishment. But it may well be that thought is more particularly focused on one aspect in some passages and on another in other passages. In Romans 3:24, because of the context, it is no doubt provision of sin as *guilt* that is in view. The same is true of Ephesians 1:7. In Titus 2:14, probably sin as *guilt* and *defilement* is contemplated. Because the aspect of sin as *power* is so frequently neglected, it is necessary to devote more attention to this feature of the biblical teaching.

This aspect was, no doubt, uppermost in the mind of Zacharias when he said, “For he hath visited and redeemed his people” (Luk 1:68). In the succeeding verses, the references to the “horn of salvation” and to salvation “from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us” (1:69, 71) indicate that the earliest New Testament expression of the redemptive hope [was] construed in terms of de-

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<sup>1</sup> **construed** – understood.

<sup>2</sup> **feasible** – capable of being done; possible.

liverance [and] understood in terms of redemption (*cf.* Luk 2:38). Acquaintance with the Old Testament will show that the faith in Jesus that these earliest witnesses reflect was framed in terms of that same category that occupies so prominent a place in the religion of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is steeped in the language of redemption. It is particularly the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt that shapes the meaning of redemption under the old covenant. Though redemption applied to Abraham (Isa 29:22), and though Jacob likewise could use the language of redemption (Gen 48:16), yet it is the exodus from Egypt that constitutes *par excellence* the Old Testament redemption. The assurance given to Moses was, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments” (Exo 6:6); and the song of deliverance was, “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed” (Exo 15:13). Later books abound with allusions in similar terms (*cf.* Deu 7:8; 9:26; 13:5; 21:8; 24:18; 1Ch 17:21; Psa 77:15; 106:10; Isa 43:1; 63:9; Mic 6:4). And God Himself has no name more [deeply filled] with significance for the consolation of His people than that of Redeemer (*cf.* Psa 19:14; Isa 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 63:16; Jer 50:34). It is eloquent of the richness of the messianic promise that the Redeemer will come to Zion (Isa 59:20). This Old Testament witness provides the background for the New Testament faith expressed in Luke 1:68; 2:38. It should not surprise us, therefore, that in the New Testament the death of Christ should be represented as having direct bearing upon the archenemy of the people of God and upon the power of sin itself. Sin, as power, brings us into captivity; and Satan, as the prince of darkness and god of this world, wields his suzerainty<sup>3</sup> and brings us into bondage.

With reference to Satan’s power, we have explicit reference to the victory accomplished by Jesus’ death in John 12:31; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8. And Colossians 2:15 refers to the triumph secured over the principalities of wickedness (*cf.* Eph 6:12). It is significant that the first promise should have been in terms of the destruction of the serpent (Gen 3:15) and that the consummation should carry with it the casting of the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10)...We cannot dissociate the deception of Satan as the god of this world who blinds the minds of them that believe not (2Co 4:4) from the vain manner of life from which the precious blood of Christ redeems (1Pe 1:18). At the center of Christ’s redemptive accomplishment, therefore, is emancipation from the [slavery] of Satan’s deception and power.

We cannot dissociate the power of sin from the embrace of the redemption spoken of expressly in several of the passages already cited (*cf.* Ti 2:14; 1Pe 1:18). But when the power of sin is particularly reflected on, the consideration most relevant

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<sup>3</sup> **suzerainty** – exercise of superiority or supreme power.

to deliverance is the truth that those for whom Christ died are also represented as having died *in* Him and *with* Him (Rom 6:1-10; 7:1-6; 2Co 5:14-15; Eph 2:1-7; Col 2:20; 3:3; 1Pe 4:1-2). Of basic importance in this connection is the fact that Christ in His vicarious undertakings may never be conceived of apart from those on whose behalf He fulfilled these commitments and, therefore, when He died they were united to Him in the virtue and efficacy of His death. But when He died, He died to sin once for all (Rom 6:10). Those in Him also died to sin (Col 2:20; Rom 6:2-4; 2Co 5:14); and, if they died to sin, they died to the power of sin. This is the guarantee that those united to Christ will not be ruled by the power of sin (Rom 6:11, 14; 1Pe 4:1-2). It would be artificial to construe this precise aspect of our relation to the death of Christ and of our deliverance from the power of sin in the terms of redemption. Yet at no other point may it more appropriately be introduced. Our death to sin is bound up with Christ's death on our behalf (*cf.* 2Co 5:14); and to the latter, the redemptive concept is clearly applied.

**2. Redemption from the curse of the Law:** The curse of the Law does not mean that the Law is a curse. The Law is holy and just and good (Rom 7:13); but, because so, it exacts penalty for every infraction of its demands. The curse of the Law is the curse it pronounces upon *transgressors* (Gal 3:10). The Law's penal sanction<sup>4</sup> is as [unable to be broken] as its demands. To this sanction as it bears upon us, redemption is directed. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). Nowhere in Scripture is the price of redemption more forcefully portrayed than in this text. It reminds us that the cost was not merely the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood, but these in the circumstance of Golgotha's shame—He was "made a curse for us." We cannot measure the intensity of the reproach nor fathom the humiliation. To be unmoved before the spectacle is to be insensitive to the sanctions of holiness, the marvels of love, and the wonder of angels...In Galatians 4:5, it is redemption from the bondage of the ceremonial law that is specifically in view (*cf.* Gal 3:23-4:3). It was by being made under this law that Christ redeemed those who were under it. He secured this release because He Himself fulfilled all the truth that was set forth symbolically and typically in the provisions of the Levitical economy. These provisions were but shadows of the good things to come; and when that which they foreshadowed appeared, there was no need or place for the shadows themselves. This redemption has the fullest significance for all. By [faith in] Jesus, all without distinction enter into the full privilege of sons without the necessity of the disciplinary tutelage<sup>5</sup> ministered by the Mosaic rites and ceremonies. This is the apex of privilege and blessing secured by Christ's redemption: we receive the adoption.

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<sup>4</sup> **penal sanction** – legal penalty.

<sup>5</sup> **disciplinary tutelage** – instruction and discipline provided by a tutor or guardian.

On several occasions in the New Testament the term *redemption* denotes the consummation of bliss realized at the advent of Christ in glory (Luk 21:28; Rom 8:23; 1Co 1:30; Eph 1:14; 4:30). This shows how closely related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus' blood is the final fruition of the saving process and how the glory awaiting the people of God is conditioned by the thought of redemption.

From *The Atonement*, used with permission of P&R Publishing,  
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I do not believe we can preach the gospel....unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchange-able, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people that Christ wrought out upon the Cross.—*Charles Spurgeon*

# CHRIST'S SUCCESSFUL DEATH

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save  
that which was lost.—Luke 19:10*

**Y**OU are aware that there has been a very great discussion amongst all Christians about the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is one class of men who believe in what is called *general redemption*, affirming it to be an undoubted truth that Jesus Christ hath shed His blood for every man and that the intention of Christ in His death was the salvation of men considered as a whole. They have, however, to overlook the fact that in this case Christ's intention would be frustrated in a measure. Others of us hold what is called the doctrine of *particular redemption*. We conceive that the blood of Christ was of an infinite value, but that the intention of the death of Christ never was the salvation of all men. For if Christ had designed the salvation of all men, we hold that all men would have been saved. We believe that the intention of Christ's death is just equal to its effects; and, therefore, I start this morning by announcing what I regard to be a self-evident truth: whatever was the *intention* of Jesus Christ in coming into the world, that intention most certainly shall be fulfilled...

In the first place, it seems to be *inconsistent with the very idea of God that He should ever intend anything that should not be accomplished*. When I look at man, I see him to be a creature so distracted with folly and so devoid of power that I do not wonder that he often begins to build and is not able to finish. I do not marvel that full often he stops short because he hath not counted the cost. I wonder not, when I think how much there is that is above man's control, that he should sometimes propose but that God should dispose far differently from his proposition...But when I think of God Whose name is "I AM THAT I AM" (Exo 3:14), the self-existent One in Whom we live and move and have our being, Who is from everlasting to everlasting, the Almighty God; when I think of Him as filling immensity, having all power and strength, knowing all things, having a fullness of wisdom, I cannot associate with such an idea of God the supposition of His ever failing in any of His intentions. It would seem to me that a god who could intend a thing and fail in his intention would be no god, but be a thing like *ourselves*—perhaps superior in strength, but certainly not entitled to worship. I cannot anyhow think of God as a true and real God...except as a being Who *wills* and it is accomplished, Who *speaks* and it is done, Who *commands* and it stands fast forever, settled in heaven. I cannot therefore imagine, since Jesus Christ was the Son of God, that in His atonement and redemption His real intention and desire can be frustrated in any

way. If I...believed Jesus Christ to be a mere man, I could of course imagine that the result of His redemption would be uncertain. But believing that Jesus Christ [is] very God of very God, equal and co-eternal with the Father, I dare not associate with that name of Jehovah-Jesus any suspicion that the design of His death shall remain unaccomplished, lest I should be guilty of presumption and blasphemy.

**But again, we have before us the fact that *hitherto, all the works of God have accomplished their purpose.*** Whenever God has uttered a prophecy by the lips of His servants, it has surely [happened]...Every word of God hath certainly been accomplished. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psa 2:2-4). Still, He worked His own sovereign will. Let them do as they pleased, God was over them all, reigning and ruling evermore! If, then, God’s purpose in providence certainly never has been frustrated, am I to imagine that God’s purpose in the glorious sacrifice of Jesus Christ shall be null and void? If there be any of you who have arrived at such a contortion of intellect as to conceive that a less work being accomplished, a greater one shall fail, I must leave you to yourselves: with you, I could not argue. I should think you incapable of an argument. Surely, if God the Master, the Judge, the King, hath in all things done according to His own pleasure in this lower world—in the mere creation and preservation of men—it is not to be dreamed of for a moment that when He stoops Himself from the highest heaven to give His own heart’s blood for our redemption, He shall in that be foiled. No, though earth and hell be against Him, *every* purpose of Jesus on the cross shall be consummated!...As the means were fully provided, so shall the end be accomplished to its utmost jot and tittle.

**But again, I invite you to stand at *the foot of the cross* and take a view of Jesus Christ.** And then I will put it to you whether you can imagine that Jesus Christ *in any measure* could have died in vain. Come, believer, place thyself in the Garden of Gethsemane: hide thyself among those dark olives and listen to yonder man Who is in agony. Dost hear those groans? They are the groans of [the] incarnate God. Dost hear those sighs? They are the sighs of the Son of Man—God over all, blessed forever (Rom 9:5). Hearest thou those strong cries, and dost thou see those tears? They are the crying and the tears of Him Who is equal with His Father, but Who condescended to be a man (Phi 2:5-8). Rise, for He has risen! Judas has betrayed Him and taken Him away. Look on that ground. Seest thou those gouts<sup>1</sup> of gore? It is the bloody sweat of the man Christ Jesus. I conjure<sup>2</sup> thee: answer this

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<sup>1</sup> **gouts** – large splashes or clots.

<sup>2</sup> **conjure** – appeal solemnly to.

question. Standing in the Garden of Gethsemane with those blood gouts staining the white frost of that cold midnight, canst thou believe that one of those clots of blood shall fall to the ground and not effect its purpose? I challenge thee, O Christian, whatever thy doctrinal opinions, to say “Yes” to such a question as that. Canst thou imagine that a sweat of blood from the veins of incarnate Deity shall ever fall to the ground and *fail*? Why, beloved, the word of God that cometh forth out of His mouth shall not return unto Him void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases (Isa 55:11). How much more shall the great WORD of God...accomplish the purpose whereunto God hath sent Him and prosper in the thing for which it pleased God to ordain Him!

**But now come with me to *the hall of judgment*.** See there your Master placed in mock state in the midst of a ribald<sup>3</sup> band of soldiers. Do you see how they spit on those blessed cheeks, how they pluck His hair, how they buffet Him? Do you see the crown of thorns with its ruby drops of gore? Hark! Can you hear the cry of the multitude, as they say, “Crucify him, crucify him” (Luk 23:21)? And will you now stand there and look at this man whom Pilate has just brought forth, still bleeding from the lash of the scourge, covered with shame, spitting, and mockery, and as this “Behold the man” (Joh 19:5) is presented to you, will you believe that this, the incarnate Son of God, shall be made such a spectacle to men, to angels, and to devils, and yet fail of His design? Can you imagine that one lash of that whip shall have a fruitless aim? Shall Jesus Christ suffer this shame and spitting, and yet endure what were far worse—a *disappointment in the fulfillment of His intentions*? No, God forbid! By Gethsemane and Gabbatha, we are pledged to the strong belief that what Christ designed by His death must certainly be accomplished.

**Then again, see Him *hanging on His cross*.** The nails have pierced His hands and feet, and there in the broiling sun, He hangs—He hangs to die. The mockery has not ceased: still they put out the tongue and wag the head at Him. Still they taunt Him with “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Mat 27:40). And now His bodily pains increase, while His soul’s anguish is terrible—even unto death. Christian, canst thou believe that the blood of Christ was shed in vain? Canst thou look at one of those precious drops as it trickles from His head, His hands, or His feet, and canst thou imagine that it shall fall to the ground and perish there?...I never can imagine that the value, the merit, the power of the blood of Jesus ever shall die out or that its purpose shall be unaccomplished. It seems to me as clear as noonday that the design of the Savior’s death must certainly be fulfilled, be what it may.

I might use a hundred other arguments. I might show that every attribute of Christ declares that His purpose must be accomplished. He certainly has love enough to accomplish His design of saving the lost, for He has a love that is bot-

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<sup>3</sup> **ribald** – offensively abusive; irreverent and vulgar.



tomless and fathomless, even as the abyss itself. He certainly has no objection to the accomplishment of His own design, for, “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Eze 33:11). Certainly, the Lord cannot fail for want of power, for where we have omnipotence there can be no deficiency of strength. Nor again, can the design be unaccomplished because it was unwise, for God’s designs *cannot* be unwise, simply because they are of God—that is to say—they are of infinite wisdom. I cannot see anything in the character of Christ or anything the wide world over that can make me imagine for one moment that Christ should die, and yet it should be said afterwards, “This man died for a purpose that He never lived to see accomplished. The object of His death was only partially fulfilled. He saw of the travail of His soul, but He was not satisfied, for He did not redeem all whom He intended to redeem.”

Now, some persons love the doctrine of universal atonement because they say it is so beautiful. It is a lovely idea that Christ should have died for all men. It commends itself, they say, to the instincts of humanity. There is something in it full of joy and beauty. I admit there is, but beauty may be often associated with falsehood. There is much that I might well admire in the theory of universal redemption; but let me just tell you what the supposition necessarily involves. If Christ on His cross intended to save every man, then He intended to save those who were damned before He died because, if the doctrine be true—that He died for all men—He died for some that were in hell before He came into this world! Doubtless, there were myriads there that had been cast away. Once again, if it were Christ’s intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed! For we have His own evidence that there is a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and into that pit must be cast some of the very persons, who according to that theory, were bought with His blood. That seems to me a thousand times more frightful than any of those horrors, which are said to be associated with the...Christian doctrine of particular redemption. To think that my Savior died for men in hell seems a supposition too horrible for me to imagine—that He was the Substitute for the sons of men and that God, having first punished the Substitute, punished men again, seems to me to conflict with any idea of justice. That Christ should offer an atonement and satisfaction for the sins of men and that afterwards those very men should be punished for the sins that Christ had already atoned for, seems to me to be the most marvelous monstrosity that ever could have been imputed to...the most diabolical heathen demons. God forbid that we should ever think thus of Jehovah, the just and wise. If Christ has suffered in man’s stead, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and save us from all unrighteousness (1Jo 1:9).

From a sermon delivered on Sabbath morning, July 11, 1858,  
at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens.

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**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this is that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, "Christ died for all men." Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, "No, certainly not." We ask them the next question—Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer "No." They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say, "No. Christ has died that any man may be saved *if*"—and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, *you*. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon when you say we limit

Christ's death; we say, "No, my dear sir, it is you that do it." We say Christ so died that He infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved, and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.—*Charles Spurgeon*