

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

1. Introduction: The Meaning of Atonement

It is probably known that theologians, and especially students of the text of Scriptures, are generally very precise about the use of words, especially theological terms. At the moment there is somewhat of a reaction to this precision. Nevertheless, defining of terms has always been helpful, and practical. It comes as a surprise to realise that the term ‘atonement’ is purely Anglo-Saxon, and is not a Biblical word, as such. It acts as an umbrella to cover a number of words such as reconciliation, expiation, propitiation, and the like. It means ‘making at one’, and can be divided into ‘at-one-ment’, which is an excellent word for reconciliation. In Romans 5:11 – the only use of the word in the N.T. – the Greek word *katalage* is, in fact, reconciliation. In the O.T. it is used many times for the Hebrew noun and verbs meaning ‘coverings’ and ‘to cover’.

For our purposes, we will use the word to cover not only the factual events of the Cross and the Resurrection, but the entire theme of the death and its effects.

2. Theories of The Atonement

It is clear that the Cross (and Resurrection) in the N.T. are saving events. Men are saved by this double-event (cf. Rom. 4:25). No theory, as such, saves. A theory – or better – a rationale of the death simply sets out, as coherently and helpfully as possible, the reasons for and mode of the death. Even John the Baptist (John 1:29, cf. Mark 1:4) saw the death (‘Lamb that takes away sin’), and Jesus (Matt. 26:28) gave some rationale to the Cross. Of course the Epistles set out their rationale in even stronger terms, but theology – that which comes after the canon of Scripture – seeks to give a full rationale to the death-resurrection events. These theories may be found in any comprehensive systematic theology, e.g. Berkhof, Strong.

Very briefly, these theories are as follows:

- i) The Ransom Theory:** the earliest of all, originating with the Fathers, claiming that Christ offered himself as ransom (Mark 10:45), which of course he did. It was debated as to what the ransom was, and to whom it was given. Some views were quite bizarre. It relates to the later views of victory called:
- ii) The Victory Theory.** ‘Christus Victor’ by Bishop Aulen propounds this view, held to a great degree by Luther and some reformed theologians. However, this is a richer view than that of the Fathers.

- iii) The Satisfaction View.** Its main proponent was Archbishop Anselm, who wrote ‘Our Deus Homo?’ (Why God Became Man). He says that God's offended honour and dignity was restored or rehabilitated. Later theories incorporate the idea of satisfaction. The satisfaction is given by Christ in his suffering.
- iv) The Moral Theory.** First propounded by Abelard and Origen, it was later reshaped by men such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Bushnell and Campbell. Briefly, it insists that no satisfaction for sin (or God's dignity) was required. The death of the Cross identified God with man in his grief and suffering. Such an example inspires to great (responsive) love. Obviously there are great weaknesses here.
- v) The Governmental Theory.** God is Governor. He is able to determine what He requires. He can abrogate the law, or rather its total punishment. Christ on the Cross bears a nominal punishment, thus showing that God views sin seriously. However, He forgives, having put this safe-guard around His law.
- vi) The Example Theory.** Man, as well as God needs to be reconciled. Expiation is pagan, and not Christian. Christ dies, not effectively as an expiatory sacrifice, but as a noble martyr, and provides the example for us. We are inspired to repent, and to reform by the act of the (influenced) will. Propounded by Socinus in the 16th century, it has a unitarian background.
- vii) The Mystical Theory** (Gradual Extirpation of Depravity). Christ entered the world in the flesh of fallen humanity, but brought a new factor, a new kind of life, which destroys original depravity on the Cross, so that a new humanity emerges through Christ. By identification with us, and we with him, man is gradually sanctified, and his sanctification becomes, in fact, his justification.
- viii) Vicarious Repentance Theory.** Was evolved by McLeod Campbell, and claimed that perfect repentance is all that is required for forgiveness. This Christ effects in the Cross, where he identifies with man under condemnation. Man, thus being forgiven, has an impetus to holiness.
- ix) The Substitutionary Theory of the Atonement.** Generally expounded by the Reformers, and held by evangelicals, though with varying modifications, it says simply that Christ died for man, in man's place, taking his sins and bearing them for him. The bearing of the sins takes the punishment of them, and sets the believer free from the penal demands of the law. The righteousness of the law and the holiness of God are satisfied by this substitution. Opponents of this theory say that expiation or propitiation are pagan concepts, and that in fact such substitution is immoral. Exponents reply that substitution was a principle of the Jewish economy, and that current (Greek) views rejected expiation whilst Christianity (and Judaism) espoused it.

3. Atonement in The Scriptures

When we regard the Scriptures as a unity, that is, as an integrated whole, we must also keep in mind that there is a strong element of progressive revelation. This is by nature of the case, since God's plan progresses in history, moving towards its fulfilment. Hence late in time, many elements appear more clearly etched, e.g. the Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Jesus, and the Person of the Holy Spirit. Likewise we may not expect to find ideas of expiation, propitiation and the like in the same modes as we later discover them.

By the same token, God is not more Father late in history when He has always been, essentially, Father. Hence the principle of Fatherhood has always been there, whether undetected or revealed. Likewise the principle of atonement may well be seen in the O.T., yet not always after the mode in which it appears in the N.T. Hence when we examine the O.T. Scriptures we may have to seek to know how expiation was viewed in its context – a task which is not easy.

(i) Atonement in the Old Testament

(a) The Patriarchs

The first sacrifice we have in the O.T. is that of Cain and Abel. No rationale is given, but it is clear that Cain offers his sacrifice in guilt but not for guilt. See Gen. 4:6–7, cf. I John 3:11f. More than this we do not know. Whether it was offered for propitiation or not we do not know, yet if so, Cain's offering was unacceptable, whilst Abel's was received. (Hebrews 11:4). It is not clear that the Mosaic principle of 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins' was known and applied in those early times, but we can work back from the fact (Gen. 4:6) that if Cain's heart had been right in worshipping God, then he would have had power over sin. where there is no guilt sin has no power (Rom. 6:14). Abel's heart was right, although whether in repentance or gratitude we do not know (cf. Psalm 51:17). Whilst we have no proof that the principle of sacrifice of any sort is a creational one, yet it does seem that the offering of sacrifice to a deity, if not the Deity, is a principle where fallen humanity worships.

If Job is placed amongst the patriarchs, then sacrifice of a propitiatory nature is seen from Job 1:5, 'Job offered burnt offerings for his sons, for he said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts'. Something of this concept is in Job 42:7–9 when God says to Eliphaz, "My wrath is kindled against thee...therefore take unto you seven bullocks...and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering'* This must be expiation, or propitiation. When Noah offered his sacrifice, 'The Lord smelled the sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake''.

An altar was part of the patriarchs' lives. In Gen. 22:13 a clear substitutionary offering is made – in place of Isaac. 'Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt - offering in the place of his son.

(b) Mosaic Sacrifice

Without doubt, in the offerings of the law, there is an expiation or propitiation related to the sacrifice. Part of the mode was that the offerer identified with his sacrificial victim, thus thinking of himself being

offered up. What was required was that the offerer have a sense of sin, and so a sense of need, that he identify with the victim in offering it, and that he then offer it. Hence we read the principle of expiation, or, propitiation as follows:– (Lev. 1:4) ‘He shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him’. (4:20) – ‘Thus shall he do with the bullock as he did with the bullock of the sin-offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make atonement for them and they shall be forgiven’. (5:16) ‘... the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt-offering, and he shall be forgiven’. This statement is repeated a number of times, for different offences (cf. 4:26, 31, 35, 5:10, 6:7, etc.)

The principle of atonement is enunciated in Leviticus 17:11 – ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life’. Each word in this verse is significant. The whole principle of atonement, is here made clear. The life of the flesh, the body, the person is in the blood. In sacrifice it is the life which must be given, in order to atone. Primarily, then, the blood atones, that fluid of life which courses through the body. It seems that this is the way Moses saw atonement (Exodus 32:30-32). He says to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’. Going to the Lord, Moses says, ‘Alas, this people have sinned a great sin: they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written’. He is saying, ‘I wish to make atonement by my death’.

In Deut. 21:1-9, the case of an uncertain murder is set forth. An expiation has to be made for the murder, and this is done by sacrificing a heifer in a valley where water is running. It seems that the life of the heifer is a substitute to take away the guilt of murder, that is, the guilt is put upon the heifer: it suffers the death.

In simple terms, the atonement is an offering for the sin of the offerer which removes his guilt. It may be said that by offering, the offerer ‘does something’ about his sin. This may be called expiation. Yet it may mean more, that he offers some satisfaction to God for the sin he has done. If satisfaction means ‘bribe’ in any sense, then the whole contract is immoral. However Lev. 17:11 points out that God has given the principle of atonement. Hence when we look at the subject of the wrath of God, then speaking of propitiation and satisfaction will make more sense.

(c) The Prophetic Principle

Sometimes the prophets have been pictured as opposed to the sacrificial system, but this is not so. The motive of the offerer determines the valid nature (or otherwise) of the person. So the prophecies denounce hypocritical or insincere offerings. Prophecy is related to the on-going plan of God for history, or, as it is sometimes called ‘salvation history’. For this reason the sacrificial principle which relates to God's wrath, man's sin, and God's salvific purposes, must be linked with prophecy.

Gen. 3:15 is possibly the basis upon which Abel offered his sacrifice, especially as it was a bloody one. We cannot, of course, be sure, but since he was a prophet (Luke 11:51) then it may well have been so. Certainly many of the prophecies speak of forgiveness, even of forgiveness which does not include anything of sacrifice, e.g. Isaiah 1:18, 40:1f., Ezekiel 36:24-28 and Jer. 31:31-34 amongst many others. In a passage such as Isaiah 53, the whole norm of sacrifice is represented in principle. except that the sacrifice or victim is the

suffering servant. He receives the wrath of God, has the sins of his people placed upon him, and bearing their griefs and sorrows makes intercession for the transgressors. His is a sacrificial death. In Daniel 9:24 the period of Israel's chastisement is to be completed 'to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place'.

The principle of atonement, then, is not negated by the prophets, but rather is extended to levels which are beyond, even the Mosaic sacrificial cultus.

(ii) Atonement in the New Testament

(a) Introduction to the Subject

Without doubt, the most difficult of all subjects or themes of Scripture is that of atonement. This is natural enough, since it strikes at the very heart of sinful man and his moral problem. It relates to the nature of God, man, and the universe, and involves the guilt of sinful mankind. Hence the emotive elements which attach to the subject. For this reason it is difficult to approach the subject without extra-Biblical presuppositions, no matter what the particular view of the participant. Hence it is difficult to work out a scheme of treatment for the subject.

Very simply, we propose to treat it as follows:— Commencing from the ground-point of creation, we will attempt to show that man, because of the Fall is culpable before God for his failure, and as a result of sinning is guilty for his actual sins. God is wrathful because of man's sin, and sin needs to be expiated. However, man also needs to propitiate God, not because God has irrational anger, but because sin is evil and reprehensible, and reconciliation between man and God must, in some way, be affected. When it is seen that God's wrath is just, and that He has provided the atonement to deal with that wrath and satisfy the demands of the law, we can examine the liberation which is man's through the atonement, finally tracing the good effects and results for man and his universe which issue from the atonement.

(b) Man – His Creation and Fall

1. **The Creation.** God's creation of the universe is perfect, and is 'very good'. There is no imperfection within this creation, whilst man, being created in the image of God, has high responsibility to effect the command of God to be fruitful, multiply, replenish the earth, and to have lordship over it. It must be seen how high a creature is man, and what gifts and graces God has given him in order that man may carry out His commands. See Gen. 1:26f., Psalm 8, Hebrews 2:5–8, Eccles. 3:11, 7:29, I Cor. 11:7. Man must be seen to be truly man as he lives in a state of contingency upon God. He cannot reflect God if he does not relate directly to him.
2. **The Fall.** Satan's temptation is to entice man away from his state of contingency. As a creature, man will ever have to be contingent upon God – 'In Him we live and move and have our being'. In regard to his true being, man was tempted to think of himself as over and against God, and therefore distinct from Him. This constituted the fall. 'You shall be as God, (or, 'as gods'), i.e. independent, not contingent', was the proposition Adam accepted, and so he fell.

3. The Effects of the Fall. These are numerous. Death comes to man (Gen. 2:17). This should be seen primarily as a death in relationships (cf. contra. II Cor.4:14–15). To know God is life John 17:3, I John 5:20. Man, in Adam, rejects the knowledge of God: see Romans 1:19ff. At the same time, man is in fear and guilt. This is clear from Genesis 3:9ff. ‘I heard Your voice in the garden and I hid myself because I was afraid, because I was naked’.

Man's reprehensibility relates to his refusal to carry out the mandate in its pure form (Gen. 1:28f.). He rebels against God. He seeks to set up his own autonomy. He is caught in guilt. He suffers as a person out of harmony with his own created universe. He is a sinner. He becomes subject to evil powers (cf. I John 5:19, I John 3:10–11, Ephes. 2:1–3).

(c) Man and the Nature of Sin

In the Bible there are descriptions of sin, statements made as to what it is. The subject is exceedingly difficult, mainly because man is a sinner. He cannot approach this subject objectively. Also sin is an irrationality in God's true, created world. James Denney says, ‘We have no right to assume that the origin of sin will ever be understood – in other words, that we shall discover the rationale of the irrational...’ (Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation, p.189).

In practice we have statements of revelation which tell us, experimentally what sin is, and what it does, and in what kind of relationship it places us with God. We need to understand some of these elements.

1. **Sin is a state in which man lives, and in which he is alienated from God.** This is seen in the effects of Adam's rebellion. He is cut off from his former, innocent relationship with God. (Isaiah 59:2).
2. **Sin is Depravity. This must first of all be seen as deprivation.** Man is deprived of life, of full relationship with God. Hence he is deficient. (Rom. 3:23) Because of what he has lost, or rejected, he is innately evil (Jer. 17:9, Romans 3:10–18, Mark 7:21).
3. **Sin Causes Compulsive Transgression.** Man, because of his sin, hated God. See Col. 1:21, Ephes, 2:1, Romans 1:19–32. His hatred springs from his guilt–fear (Gen. 3:9f., cf. 4:4–7). He moves from one stage of depravity to another, as outlined in Romans ch. one, cf. vs. 24–26.
4. **Sin is a Power in Man, holding him in bondage.** John 8:34, Rom. 3:9, I Cor. 15:56, II Peter 2:19. ‘It is its guilt which gives it power. Its guilt alienates us from God, and in virtue of this alienation that sin reigns in us’.. (Denney, op.cit., p.191).
5. **Sin places man in a camp that is evil, and hostile to God.** I John 5:19, Ephes. 2:1–3.

Later, in discussing the effects of the atonement, we will see how sin is defeated and man liberated, and in doing so will discuss the psychological effects of sin, in man, Here, however, it is sufficient to point out that in practice three elements of sin trouble man deeply, and hold him in bondage, i.e. the pollution, the penalty and the power of his sin.

(d) The Holiness and Righteousness of God

As we move towards a rational of the wrath of God, we must first see His holiness. Habakkuk 1:13 shows us that God's holiness is not a passive ethical purity, but a dynamic quality, acting upon evil. 'Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on wrong, why dost thou look on faithless men, and art silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?' The prophet is saying, 'Your holiness is dynamic, judging evil, and executing punishment. Why then do you not act in this situation? Why do you seem to be out of character with yourself?' John says, 'God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all'.

Such holiness destroys an impure world, or, rather, its impure humanity at the time of the Flood. It visits Sodom and Gomorrah. Likewise it abominates evil. God's righteousness is generally spelled out in terms of His law. Paul is making this point in Romans 3:21. By the law is the knowledge of sin, and by the law God shows His own righteousness. Man is a transgressor of the law and is unrighteous. Man should conform to the will and nature of God, and be holy. This is implicit in creation, and so is required of all men and demanded specifically of God's people in Lev. 11:44 (cf. Exodus 19:5–6, cf. I Peter 2:9–10):– **'Be you holy, for I am holy', says the Lord.**

God is the fountain of living waters (cf. Jer. 2:13), and man is to reflect the fountain by having the issues of life (holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth, and love) flow from him also. Hence Proverbs 4:23, 'Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs (issues: holiness, righteousness, etc.) of life'. When man becomes 'a muddied stream and a polluted fountain' (Proverbs 25:26) then he has failed to be in the image of God, and to reflect Him. The most frightening and horrific thing about man is that he has repudiated, in practice, the image of God. As God is dynamic, so also man is intended to be, but his dynamic has become a perverse dynamic. He reverses righteousness into unrighteousness, holiness into impurity, love into hate, and so on. This is made very clear in Romans 1:18, where he is said to suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

God's holiness, as indeed His righteousness, must, because of man's sin, act against all evil, including man in his sin. As Hab. 1:13 indicates, it is impossible for God to pass by any evil. Everything must be judged.

(e) The Wrath of God

The subject, we claim, is the essential element in any discussion of atonement. However, it is the emotive subject for obvious reasons. Man is in rebellion against God, and guilt does not acknowledge the righteous nature of judgement. On the more psychological side, there is confusion about wrath. Because of human wrath and anger, we reject such an element as divine wrath. Our images of wrath are generally formed from human experiences, and are naturally deficient. So for that matter are our human images of love. We could go further, and say that our images of fatherhood are formed from human precedents. All are faulty. We can agree that 'our Father who is in heaven' must marvellously transcend any father who is on earth – even the best. Likewise we must agree that divine love is of a higher quality than human love. So it is with wrath which is divine. It is better than the best human wrath, and some human wrath can be marvellous, especially when it is directed against evil, cruelty and injustice. A few

modern comments on the wrath of God are appended below.¹

Certain elements of the wrath of God should be noted:

- (a) **It is personal.** C. H. Dodd (with others) has propounded the view that wrath is an impersonal thing, the normal retribution which comes from opposing the functional laws of the universe. Certainly harm comes from doing this, yet even here God is personally present, to and through His laws. However, the Scripture makes it clear that God is personally angry and personally punishes. e.g. Ezekiel 7:8ff., 'I the Lord do smite'. 'O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, nor chasten me in the wrath' For thine arrows have sunk into me, and thy hand has come down on me'. (Psalm 38:1ff.) We will presently deal with this personal action.
- (b) **It is God's own wrath against evil.** It is not simply a dualistic conflict of good and evil (as abstractions). Hence in Romans 1:18, Ephes. 5:6, Col. 3:6, John 3:36, Revelation 19:15, and innumerable O.T. passages (e.g. Psalm 11:5–7, Hosea 9:15–17, 8:5, 8:14, and actual judgements as at the Flood and Sodom and Gomorrah) all tell us that God has ever been wrathful against evil, that at present He is revealing His wrath upon all evil, and that there will be an ultimate action of His wrath at the end of the age. This latter is seen in various places in the Revelation, in the prophecies of the 'the day of the Lord' in both the O.T. and the N.T. So in Romans 2:5 Paul speaks of 'the day of wrath when God's righteous judgement will be revealed'. Notice that wrath and judgement are a revelation: they do not come naturally to the natural mind. Again in II Thess. 1:7–8 a terrible picture is drawn of the wrath of God being inflicted by Christ upon those who 'do not know God and who do not believe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus'.
- (c) **God's Wrath is Present, and is felt in the Conscience.** What does Paul mean when he says, 'God's wrath is being revealed from heaven'? He specifies clearly what this wrath is, and it should be noted carefully in that first chapter of Romans. It is:
1. Rejection of the nature of God, and so, inevitably, rejection of the true nature of man and the universe.
 2. It is retrogression to idolatry.

¹ G. O. Griffith: 'we picture 'wrath' as we might think of the fury of the storm. The Hebrew prophets, when they spoke of 'the wrath of God', ethicised the idea of anger so that it meant the implacable hostility of the Divine Holiness to every form of moral evil.' ... 'The wrath is no fitful outburst of personal anger, but the implacable antagonism of holiness for evil, and antagonism that burns eternally'. (St. Paul's Gospel to the Romans pp21, 85f.) Peguey says, 'Wrath is the emotional response of a sound personality to anything low, vile, or mean'. J. G. Mackenzie quotes Father Danielou as saying, 'There is hardly anything in the terminology of religion that gives more offence to the pious (or prudish) ears of the modern world than this expression: the wrath of God.. In our day, Simone Weil, for example, finds it simply intolerable: for she, like Marcion of old, contrasts the New Testament God of love with the Old Testament God of wrath. Unfortunately for the position, there is love in the Old Testament, and wrath in the New, as Tertullian pointed out long ago. We have to reckon, whether we like it or not, with wrath as one of the divine attributes; and what is more, for all its anthropomorphic appearance, this particular word may carry a stronger charge than any other, and afford the deepest insight into the meaning of the divine transcendence'. (The Meaning of Guilt).

3. It is initial immorality which comes when God 'gives them up to the lusts of their hearts'. (v.24)

4. It is being further given up to sexual perversion (v.26–27)

5. It is being given up to a base (reprobate) mind where moral distinctions are blurred (v.26–31). Even here, the knowledge of retribution remains (v.32), yet the reprobate mind delights in evil.

On the basis of this passage we make a proposition:– 'The wrath of God is not sin, but sin is the wrath of God'. What do we mean by this? In order to understand, we have to retrace our steps, seeing again what is the nature of sin. As we have said, sin is irrational in relation to God's ordered and functional universe. Hence when a person sins he receives the immediate fact of guilt for his sin. He transgresses the moral law, which is the true order of the universe. Thus he suffers in his conscience. Further, we must recognise that sin is not abstract. It is acts which men do, and having done them man has to live in the guilt of them. Whilst he may or may not have feelings of guilt, he is nevertheless guilty. There will inevitably be some subjective counterpart to his objective sinning. Even the hardening of his conscience will be one of the retributive factors.

The Greek view of sin is that it is 'a regrettable error'. At the worst, it is something which is legally marked up against a person. In the Hebrew understanding of sin, the acts and attitudes of sin all make their terrible mark upon the sinner. He lives in his sin. Hence in Psalms such as 31, 32, 40, and 65 sin is almost personalised as powerful vitalistic entities which work dynamically in the depths of man, bringing him into misery and even physical sickness and mental anguish. Yet he himself does not realise that these are the affects and effects of unconfessed sin, guilt as it is retained within the personality.

Two Levels of Sin–Experience

This state is graphically described on two levels – (1) In Isaiah 5: 20–23 the mind has become reprobate (cf. Romans 1:28ff.) for it calls 'evil good and good evil' and 'darkness light and light darkness'. Moral discernment has not only vanished – it has become perverted. (2) In Isaiah 57: 20–21 'The wicked are like the restless sea which casts up mire and dirt. 'There is no peace to the wicked', says my God'. In other words, the accumulation of evil, and the festering guilt has brought unease and terror to the guilty one. This is much the same as 'Be sure your sin will find you out', or, 'The wages of sin is death', or as Denney says '...the sin itself coming back in another form and finding out the sinner'. (Op.cit. p.208).

(d) The Experiential Nature of God 's Wrath. We begin now to see the nature of God's wrath. In modern terms it can be seen as man's existential loneliness, his awryness within a 'straight' universe, his being out of line with true righteousness. In fact it is a denial of his essential created self, now catching up with him. God's wrath is his own sin tormenting him, but doing so because God is personal, and God is unremittingly present to him in every detail. 'In Him we live and move and have our being'. That is anguish for the rebellious sinner. As Job said indignantly, 'How long wilt thou not look away from me, nor let me alone until I swallow my spittle?'

When we go back to Romans 1:19ff. we see that man is necessarily in great anguish since he denies his essential created self. In reaching out for freedom he finds himself in terrible bondage. Since by creation he is essentially structured as a child of God, a creature of the Creator, and a

servant of the Lord God, by his disobedience (rejection of the knowledge-of things-as-they-are) he, thinking himself to be free is in intolerable anguish and bondage. Gide says, 'I assure you that the feeling of freedom can plunge the soul into a kind of anguish...Give me some reason for living. I have none left. I have freed myself. That may be. But what does it signify? This objectless liberty is a burden to me.' Paul Satre says, 'I am condemned to be free.' Hence, speaking of man he says '...this obscene and empty existence is bestowed on him in vain'.

Add to this that man, outside of God has to make his choices in every situation, yet without the assurance of a functional world, or a purposive goal, and man is in a desperate plight. Nor is this all. We know that his conscience dogs him, whatever set of standards he may develop for it. This is why Augustine says that '...man carries about in his mortality, the testimony that God is angry with the wicked every day'. (Cf. Psalm 7:11). To this Forsyth adds, 'Nothing will satisfy the conscience of man which does not first satisfy the conscience of God'.

Paul Tillich adds the ultimate:– *'To be in servitude to the fear of death in our lifetime means being in servitude to the fear of death which is nature and guilt at the same time. In the fear of death it is not merely the knowledge of our finiteness which is preserved, but also the knowledge of our infinity, of our being determined for eternity and of our having lost eternity. We are slaves of fear, not because we have to die, but because we deserve to die.'*

To sum up then, the guilt-anguish of a person, which is not necessarily recognised as such, but which is experienced, is in fact the essential nature of sin. Its constituent elements of fear, loneliness, anguish, anger, restlessness, deprivation, pollution, purposelessness, guilt, and burden (amongst many other such elements) are in fact the sin and sins which keep us in bondage. They are also, at the same time, the actual wrath of God. The phrase 'to bear sins' is in fact this very thing. We bear the whole of sin, whilst it, for its part, brings us into dreadful torment. That torment is the wrath of God. In being given up to our sins, these sins are compounded and so guilt increases. We are walking a ceaseless treadmill of guilt. To bear fully the wrath of God is to have Him love us. (Matt. 5:43–48) It is to have to 'live and move and have our being' in Him Who is a consuming fire, that fire being, primarily, holy love' Let us repeat: this is the experiential wrath of God working in our consciences, and so, in all our personality.

(e) **The Righteous Nature of Wrath.** In Romans 2:1–5 Paul points out that God's wrath is righteous – how could it be otherwise, anyway? It is particularly so because instead of exercising instant wrath, He has exercised goodness and patience and forbearance, and such are intended to lead us to repentance. Romans 3:25 shows that in this forbearance He has (temporarily at least) passed over former sins. Acts 17:28–30 indicates the same principle, hence the prayer of Psalm 143:2 – 'Enter not into judgement with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified'. Add to this the fact that God's wrath is no end in itself, but is intended to shut us up to His mercy. This is surely the entire thrust of Romans 1:16 to 3:31. In Romans 1:18 Paul is not telling us of God's wrath in order to taunt us with it, but to commence his fascinating explanation of how God provides justification for sinful man. Hence we conclude that His wrath is in every way righteous.

4. The Whole Matter Of the Cross

1. Introduction

We now come to see the dilemma of man. God requires of him the righteousness which is that of His law, the holiness which is that of complete purity, and the love which provides for full relationships. His wrath is upon man when he does not fulfil these demands, and in a manner of speaking that wrath is 'natural' to man's rebellion-and-guilt situation. Man is unable to do anything about his sin because he has sinned and come short of the glory God gave to him (Rom. 3:23). Man is too weak to effect his salvation (Rom. 5:6), and can certainly not extricate himself from evil powers or their evil aeon (Gal. 1:4, I John 5:19). Hence man is in a dilemma. In fact he has no will to effect his salvation, except where he could do it himself, and this is impossible.

God is in no dilemma. He cannot forgive man his sin gratuitously, and in fact refuses to do so (Exod. 34:7, Nahum 1:2). He does, wonderfully enough, determine to forgive man for He had always planned the Cross. Before creation He was Father-Redeemer (Isa. 63:16) and had planned our glorification, so evidently, through the Cross. (I Cor. 2:1-12, cf. II Tim. 1:9). He does not have to connive to 'let man off the hook'. His holiness lets none off the hook. His law demands judgement (Gal. 3:10, cf. Rom. 3:19). It is foolish to talk about God's mercy triumphing over judgement and wrath, if by that we mean that wrath and mercy are opposites or in conflict, one with the other. God has planned the Cross, not as an expedient to meet a contingency, but as the deliberate fact and revelation of His love. We now proceed to see the nature of the Cross, that is, of the atonement.

2. The Action of the Cross

It would be impossible within the scope of this paper to cover the predictions of the prophets, from Genesis 3:15 to John's 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world'. Even in the life of Jesus the predictions are many, both explicit and inferred. Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:32 are three predictions in one Gospel. The great event of the transfiguration was to set him finally for going to Jerusalem and the Cross, for Moses and Elijah, appearing in glory, spoke to him of his 'exodus' which he was to 'accomplish' at Jerusalem. With all the great books written, no book has ever covered the half-veiled events and statements of Jesus' ministry. Nothing has been able to capture the grandeur and importance of his approach to the Cross. So many threads are interwoven into the Cross and we must deal with them, although taking them piecemeal is like de-threading the fibres which make the warp and woof of the atonement event.

(a) Propitiation. I John 4:10, 2:2, and Romans 3:25 are passages which speak of 'propitiation', using two related words *hilasterion* and *hilasmos*. Much debate has gathered around these words. Some commentators have preferred to use the term 'expiation' for them, since propitiation has for some the connotation of bribery, the idea of paying off to God for one's sin. Expiation rather has the idea of working out (sweating out) the penalty for one's sin, which propitiation contains the thought of appeasing wrath. Dr. Leon Morris in his 'Apostolic preaching of the Cross' has devoted a rich study to the term propitiation, and comes down on the side of the fact that it does appease God's wrath. It (the atonement) averts that wrath, because Christ bears it. Why should we be ashamed of this concept? Nor is it simply a concept. Without substitution nothing can happen for man. We have seen his dilemma. He is under wrath. He cannot bear that wrath and expiate it – for he has no such moral resources. Outside of time,

he could never cover his guilt. Hence one must do it for him. That one is Christ.

The scriptures quoted immediately above tell us that God set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

What does this mean? It means that the wrath of which we spoke in Romans 1:18 – the wrath that is sin, and its guilt, in its devastating action upon man, through his conscience, is actually borne by Christ. It is similar to the term of Galatians 3:13 – ‘God made him to be curse for us.’ ‘Cursed is he who hangs on a tree (cf. Deut. 21:23). He was not cursed because he hung on a tree; he was hung on a tree because he was (the) curse. This accords with Jesus’ words on the night of his betrayal. ‘You shall all be scandalised because of me this night, for it is written, ‘I will smite the shepherd’. This scripture is a slightly changed quote of Zechariah 13:7, ‘Awake (be unsheathed) O sword, against my shepherd, against my peer, says the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd...’ The sword (see Deut. 32:40–41, Romans 13:4) is the sword of judgement. Christ is the judged. Hence in Isaiah 53:4–5 he is certainly stricken by God:

‘Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,
Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
And with his wounds we are healed.’

Verse 10 says, ‘Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him:
He has put him to grief.’

Why are we revolted by the suffering that God brought upon him – His Son? Is it that we have greater pity than God, or does the sympathetic substitutionary nature of his wrath-bearing tell us that this is the wrath we should have borne? Many have called this ‘immoral’. And why? Did not the Father set him forth? Did not the Son express that it was his joy and love to do the Father’s will? (John 10:17, 14:30–31). Did not God give us the atonement, and what if He had not? What could we offer to destroy the bad conscience and be free?

Look again at the Cross. Read Psalm 38:1–8 where the psalmist expresses his terror and anguish at the wrath of God. Where, in all the universe is a man who can say, ‘I do not need that propitiating act’? What if Father and Son, and indeed Spirit (Heb. 9:14) counsel together to fulfil the righteousness of the law, and expend the wrath – justly upon sin – for sinners? Shall they not do this? And is this not the supreme, the highest, the unique expression and demonstration and actuation of love?

What does Romans 8:1 mean when it says ‘There is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.’? It means there is no guilt. He has become curse for us. He has taken the curse, which is guilt and shame and wrath within the human spirit, and has borne it to extinction, to exhaustion, to nothingness. Hence Paul speaks of him as the one who saved us from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:10, Romans 5:10) by his death.

(b) Justification. Correctly speaking justification is not an action of the Cross, but a fruit of it. The law brings the curse (Gal. 3:10). He who has offended in one part of it has offended in all (James 2:10). By works of the law shall no man be justified (Gal. 2:16f.). Whatsoever the law says, it says to them that are under the law, that every mouth be stopped (in the judgement) and the whole world be proved to be guilty before

God. (Rom. 3:19). The law is ruthless. The soul that sins will die. Only when one dies for one's failure before the law is one justified. But then, one is dead' (Romans 6:7, Gal. 2:19). That death, Paul says in many places, Christ died. He bore a penal death for us. 'We are convinced that if one died for all, then did all die.' (II Cor. 5:14). Romans 6:7 indicates, in its context, that when Christ died, we died. We bore our penalty in the death that he died. (Romans 6:1–10, Gal. 2:19–21). Col. 2:14 tells us that he bore the legal demands of the law, and so the law has no legal hold over us. We are acquitted, that is, we are justified by him who justifies the ungodly. Hence Paul says, 'Through this man is declared unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him are you justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law'.

Yet this justifying death demanded that he bear the total curse and judgement of the law. Hence Peter says, 'He died, the just for the unjust' (I Peter 3:18).

(c) Death. Heb. 2:14–15 tells us that men and women through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Jesus had said, 'He who commits sin is the bondsman of sin'. (John 8:34) Man's fear of death relates to the fall. As Tillich said, he is afraid to die because he deserves to die. The sting of death is sin. (I Cor. 15:56) 'Fear relates to punishment', says John (I John 4:18). Death is the terror of man because 'the wages of sin is death'. Death is already upon him in his sin as we see from Romans 1:20ff. He is dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephes. 2:1–2). His sins are counted as 'dead works' (Heb. 6:1, 9:14), and are a dreadful clog upon his conscience. In fact this is the curse as man experiences it. Without death by Christ, man cannot be freed from death.

Paul says, 'We judge that if one died for all then did all die'. He adds, 'In that he died, he died unto sin, once death has no more dominion over him'. (Rom. 6:10) His death was a taking and enduring the sting and power that death has upon the human personality on which it fastened at the fall (Romans 5:12ff.). This great monster has been tackled, and destroyed (Death, where is they sting?). 'He tasted death for every man', says the writer of Hebrews (2:9). Sin is death, and when sin was destroyed, so was death. Wrath was death to man, but wrath was borne, and death vanquished. 'He through death destroyed him who has the power of death, even the devil, and liberated them, who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage'. (Heb. 2:14–15).

(d) Sin. What did he do in respect of sin? The Scripture has much to say. He said, 'This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins'. (Matt. 26:28) Paul says, 'He gave himself for (uper 'on behalf of') our sins...' (Gal. 1:4). 'Sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for (peri – 'concerning') sin, condemned sin in the (his) flesh...' (Romans 8:3). 'He bore our sins in his body on the tree...' (I Peter 2:24). 'For our sake he (God) made him to be sin who knew no sin...' (II Cor. 5:21). 'He gave himself for us (huper) that he might ransom us from all iniquity and that he might purify for himself a people...' (Titus 2:14). 'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' (Hebrews 9:14). '...he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.' (Heb. 9:26) 'When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins...' (Heb. 10:12) 'To him who loves us and had loosed us from our sins by his blood...' (Rev. 1:5). '...Jesus our Lord who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.' (Rom. 4:25). When to these quotations, which are not the sum total, Isaiah chapter 53 is added, then there is a wealth of explanation of the death. It was to put away sin, to

condemn sin, to effect purification of sins (cf. Heb. 1:3), to loose us from those sins, and to take out the sting of death, as also to bear away forever, the totality of our sins. As we will see, it was to break the power of sin, as also to lift its penalty, and so set us free. At the same time it was the power to purge sin forever, wherever it might be.

With the destruction of sin goes its guilt, its pollution, and its power. With the destruction of sin the power of death is broken. With this is broken the power of Satan and all his evil. Mankind is ransomed.

(e) Satan and the Ransom. The ‘victory’ theme of the Cross (cf. 1.Cor. 15:55–56) is that sin is destroyed, guilt is removed, and Satan's hold on man is broken. Hebrews 2:14–15 says that through death Christ destroys the power of death which Satan wields. When sin is destroyed Satan has no hold on man. Yet the Cross was the battleground of evil powers. This is seen from John 12:31, 14:30–31, Luke 11:21ff., 22:53, Col. 2:14–15, Hebrews 2:14–15, Jude 9, and Psalm 22. The sum of these is that Satan comes with accusation to accuse all men of their sin in the person of Jesus Christ who takes upon him the sin and guilt of the world. At the Cross Jesus, by destroying sin and its guilt, takes away the hold Satan has had over men. However it has been a bitter struggle, for evil powers are well described in Psalm 22 as ‘wild beasts’, ‘strong bulls of Bashan’, ‘the assembly of dogs’, and so on. In Col. 2: 11–15 we see the evil powers concentrating at the Cross, only to be made an open show, humiliated as the legal guilt against man is nailed to the Cross. Hence Gal. 1:4 says he gave himself for our sins to deliver us up out of this present evil age, i.e. Satan and his world system. Thus Paul adds in Gal. 6:14 that the Cross has crucified the world. Satan then is defeated in the atonement. He can no longer falsify the wrath of God as cruel, and vengeful, for the revelation of the Cross shows that the wrath is averted from man, to ‘the proper Man’ who willingly takes it for his brethren. That is why he became flesh and blood.

The theme ‘ransom’ is used in a number of cases. Mark 10:45 tells us that the Son of Man came to give his life a ransom for many. Likewise Titus 2:14 speaks of ransoming. I Peter 1:18–19 tells us we were ransomed by the precious blood of Christ. In I Cor. 6:19 we are told we were bought with a price. It is not the point at all, anyway, that a ransom was given to anyone, either God or Satan. To give to Satan – a ransom – would be ludicrous. It is that a great cost was given for us. What was needed to loose us, was given. As we have seen, it was the bearing of the sins, the suffering of the curse and wrath, it was playing out evil until it was defeated. This was the cost, this was the ransom.

(f) The Conscience and Reconciliation. Whatever conscience is, it becomes our enemy when we are in sin. It judges, and even executes judgement. It becomes the vehicle for the accusation of Satan, and the convicting power of the Spirit. Shakespeare's words are true, ‘Conscience doth make cowards of us all’. Conscience is not an infallible guide or a perfect moral monitor. Paul says, ‘To the pure in heart all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted’. (Titus 1:15). On the other hand, he speaks of ‘...love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.’ The latter is the fruit of the Cross.

Christ offered himself with a pure conscience, and the power of that conscience cannot be measured. Hence, in the death, he dealt with the demands of the human conscience, which at depth are the demands of the law, which are the demands of God. P. T. Forsyth said, ‘It takes as much to satisfy the conscience of man as it does to satisfy the conscience of God’. He meant that, in the ultimate, the human conscience will not let man ‘off

the hook' until it sees the penalty paid. This – by revelation of the Word and the Spirit – it sees in the Cross. Hence Hebrews 9:14 speaks of the Blood of the Cross purging the conscience from dead works, so that the worshipper now serves the living God. This idea is repeated in Rev. 7:14. In Hebrews 10:22 the writer speaks of a heart which is cleansed from an evil conscience ('a consciousness of evil').

Reconciliation relates to conscience. When a man is plagued by conscience he has neither the will nor desire to be reconciled to God. The block against reconciliation is the sins of man. Because of them a man may not approach God. God in His love makes His Son to be sin, for us, so that our sins are not imputed against us. The removal of guilt, both subjectively and objectively, allows us to 'receive the Reconciliation' (Romans 5:10-11, cf. II Cor. 5:18-21). Col. 1:20-21 tells us that all things are reconciled by the blood of the Cross.

3. The Fruits of the Cross

In fact, above, we have had to speak of the fruits of the Cross along with the action of the Cross. It does not greatly matter. Below we will necessarily speak of the action of the Cross with the fruits of the Cross. As we have said, the wisdom of God in the Cross is a multi-coloured wisdom, and we cannot separate the threads of its warp and woof. We can simply view the work and fruits of redemption from many angles, all of which are enriching and liberating to the mind and heart.

(a) **Forgiveness of Sins.**² This is linked primarily with Covenant, and in particular the New Covenant. See Jer. 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:24-28, Matt. 26:28, Gal. 3:13-14, Luke 1:68f. The forgiveness of sins is linked with justification in Romans 4:1-4, 25, Psalm 32:1-4, and Acts 13:38, and other references. Forgiveness is based upon the work of the Cross (Ephes. 1:7, Matt. 26:28, Col. 1:13-14, Rev. 1:5). However, as a fruit it means that man can now know the experience of total forgiveness for all his sins. In fact, whilst repentance and faith are essential for receiving forgiveness of sins, they too are gifts of God, in fact fruits of the Cross. Forgiveness is a gift (Acts 5:31, 10:42), and must be received. When God forgives man, man is expected to forgive his fellow-man (Matt. 18:21ff., Col. 3:13, Ephes. 4:30-31). If he does not forgive, his forgiveness dies on him, i.e. his sense of forgiveness. He must never forget he is purged from his sins (II Peter 1:9) for this is the mainspring of his love (Luke 7:47). Also he is committed to spread the message of forgiveness (Luke 24:44f., John 20: 19-23). Again if he does not, then his sense of forgiveness will become stale. Forgiveness is the way we know God, and know Him as love (cf. Jer. 31:31-34, I John 4:10, Luke 7:47, etc.). Forgiveness maintains man's true relationship with God, and is, in fact his life.³

W. Telfer says, 'Now the proclamation of power on earth to forgive sins would have no virtue if it were not power to disengage the sinner from the earthly chains he has made for himself by his sins.' '... the assurance of pardon restores moral liberty to the soul.' ('The Forgiveness of Sins', pp. 144-45)

² An extended treatment is given in LFS No. 2, 'The Whole of Forgiveness'

³ Cf. LFS No. 2

(b) Liberation and Liberty. Liberation is something enacted over enslaved man. He is liberated. Cf. John 8:31–36, Luke 4:17ff. Jesus said he came to effect man's liberation. This is effected in the whole person of man. His guilt is destroyed, his pollution is cleansed, his penalty is lifted, his dread of judgement is finished. Hence he is liberated. However, his liberation is only with a view to liberty, that is to live freely. (Cf. II Cor. 3:6, 17, Gal. 5:1f., then see Gal. 5:13, II Peter 2:19). A key passage on Christian freedom is Romans 6. In this, man is shown to be liberated, and by recognising this and yielding his members for righteousness he is free to obey, and free to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. The same drive is in I Peter 2:24 'live to righteousness' when the believer is 'dead to sin'. Likewise in II Cor. 5:21, where Christ has died that 'in him we might become the righteousness of God'. Liberty is simply obedience (cf. Psalm 119:45, James 1:25, 2:12).

(c) Sanctification. The basis of sanctification is of course, cleansing. Cf. Heb. 1:3, 10:22, Titus 2:14, Heb. 9:14, I Cor 6:11, Titus 3:5, etc. The cleansed heart now has a new disposition (Rom. 7:22) but the new power is the Spirit indwelling. Yet the word of the Cross goes on being the power of God to the believer (I Cor. 1:18). Only because our old humanity was destroyed (paralysed) at the Cross (Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20) and the flesh was crucified (Gal. 5:24), and Satan defeated (Heb. 2:14–15, Col. 2:14–15) is the new man in Christ able to live a life of holiness. Sin has been defeated by grace (Rom. 6:14) and so has lost its power to control. Yet this is not all of sanctification. I Tim. 1:5 shows that love now issues from the purified heart and conscience. Holiness is motivated by love. So see II Cor. 5:14, John 14:15, I John 4:19. Liberated man joyfully obeys, and holiness is the natural result of loving obedience. In fact this is true holiness.

(d) Love and Reconciliation. God loves, at the Cross, and effects reconciliation. We see His love, primarily, at the Cross. Then we love. See I John 4:11–12, 19. He who is forgiven little, loves little; he who is forgiven much, loves much. Since we are forgiven all, we will love fully. The mainspring of our love for God and man is the Cross. When guilt is removed, barriers fall, and we are free to love. Love, as we have seen, works itself out in the life of obedience, of reconciliation and of holiness. It expresses itself primarily in proclaiming God's love.⁴ This love must not be seen from human criteria of love, but the criteria of divine love (agape).

(e) Fatherhood and Familyhood.⁵ Ephes. 1:4–14 outlines God's plan for His family. John 11:52 shows that the work of the Cross was to bring this family together. Ephes. 2:11ff. shows that the Cross effected this. A reading of the 'Acts' let us see the human family, Jew, Samaritan and Gentile, coming together in the one household of God. This could not have been effected apart from the Cross. The order is given in Gal. 4:4–6 (cf. Gal. 3:13, 14): First justification and then sonship (adoption). Sonship infers familyhood: hence 'the brethren'. I John 4:7–12 shows us that only through the Cross do we begin to love as brethren (cf. I John 3:14). Rev. 7:9–14 shows the family at the end of the age, and all have 'made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb'. The present family lives in holiness (I Peter 2:9–10, Heb. 12:14) as it does in love. It is His holy people.

(f) The Power of History. I Cor. 15:24–28 (cf. Rev. 11:15) indicates that Christ works on, even after the Cross, on which he had cried, 'It is

⁴ See LFS No. 1 for the subject, 'The Whole Meaning of Love'.

⁵ The subject is extended in LFS No. 11, 'Fatherhood, Sonship & Family Heavenly and Human'

finished” His work of propitiation was finished, but the outworking of the Cross in power (I Cor. 1:18) has to complete the subjugation, in history, of all evil powers who originally received their death knell at the Cross, but are still seeking to live and defeat the will of God. Rev. 5:1ff shows us that the Lamb—as-it-had-been-slain is the one who now controls history and its workings. He is the Lord of Lords of Rev. 19:15ff., who metes out to evil its ultimate death-blow. Hence it is by virtue of his Cross-power that he completes history, victoriously. Nothing can ever defeat that power of the Cross Gal. 6:14.

4. Limiting the Cross

This is an extremely emotive subject. The finality of the Cross, and the absolute nature of its redemption has often been caught in the vortex of two major doctrines – the eternal security of believers, and the continuing insecurity of believers. This paper enters into neither, for the writer thinks these are issues the Scriptures do not raise as such. Humans raise them, of course. What is more to the point is the actual effects of the Cross. These we have seen (partly) above. The problem lies where men confuse those issues. They do it as follows:

- i) **They speak of a partial forgiveness.** That is, they see past sins forgiven, from the point where man is regenerated (converted, justified, forgiven). From then on, they see (cf. I John 1:9) that man must confess in order to be forgiven. Unwittingly they make confession an added ‘extra’ to the Cross. Christ bore the sins of the whole world and so his forgiveness is total, since all sins have been borne. Whatever the place of daily acknowledgement of our sins (whoever has done all that?) what must be maintained is that confession adds nothing to the Cross, nor must it take away from it.
- ii) **They indicate a justification which must be maintained.** Galatians is the epistle which attacks the ‘cross-plus’ syndrome (cf. Gal. 2:21). Anything added to the Cross to retain, sustain or maintain justification is a lie. Justification maintains us! Romans 5:1, and 8:1 shows plainly that justification is a once-for-all act of God, declaring us acquitted from the accusation of sin, and free from its guilt. Hence Romans 6:7 ‘He that has died is justified from sin’. In the ultimate, the debate is concerning law as a way of living or faith as a way of living. Gal. 3:1–6 indicates that justified people have reverted or are in danger of reverting to law as a way of life. This is to attempt to be made perfect by the flesh. Cf. Gal. 5:16–21.
- iii) **They modify the love of God.** That is, they speak of a forgiveness, as it were, on-the-installment plan, It is handed out by dribs and drabs. Confession becomes a form of penance, buying (so to speak) forgiveness. Justification, according to some, can only be assured where there is ‘sanctification’. The latter is usually a cultic form of legalism. Sanctification is dependent upon justification, in which the power for holiness resides.⁶ Whilst, without doubt there are many warnings against coming under the deceit of sin, neglecting grace, and even drifting from it, (as also there are injunctions to earnestness, vigilance and sobriety) yet these given in, there must be a basic assurance as to the completeness of the work of the Cross for total forgiveness and absolute justification. Without this there

⁶ See the excellent volume ‘The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification’ by Walter Marshall, which treats this whole theme most powerfully.

is no true launching. Hence passages such as Romans 8:1–4, I Cor. 6:9–11, Titus 2:11–14, 3:3–7 should be examined closely and the complete work of the Cross accepted by faith, rested upon by faith, and lived out, by faith.

5. Living in the Cross

When we talk about ‘living in the Cross’ we really mean the whole event of the Cross and the Resurrection. For example Paul says (I Cor. 15:14) that if Christ be not risen we are yet in our sins. In Rom. 4:25 he shows that both forgiveness and justification depend on the Cross and the Resurrection. Hence I Cor. 1:18 says that the word (or, principle) of the Cross is the power of God ‘for those of us who are being saved’.

Some passages seem to indicate a daily death with Christ. Paul says, ‘I die daily’. (I Cor. 15:30; A.V. – ‘I die daily’, R.S.V. – ‘I am in peril every hour’, N.A.S.B. ‘why are we also in danger every hour?’). However, in its context it does not mean he dies daily the death of the Cross, but rather that he stands in jeopardy of his life, daily, because he preaches the gospel. This is found again in II Cor. 4:7–12. Every day Paul stands in danger of death – indeed feels the impact of pressure and persecution because he carries around in his body the dying (‘deathness’) of the Lord Jesus. Some have made this to be a deep mystical experience of inner crucifixion and sanctification. It is, however, otherwise. The Gospel is a scandal to the Jew, foolishness to the Greek, and Paul feels the impact of this severe opposition (cf. I Cor. 1:21–23).

One may live, daily, in the ‘good’ and fact of the Cross, but every tense tells us that crucifixion happened in the past and was completed in the past, e.g. our old humanity was crucified with him, and we have died (Rom. 6:7–8), I have been crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20), the world has been crucified (Gal. 6:14), you have died (Col. 3:3), and so on. Physical selfcrucifixion is an impossibility, likewise spiritual crucifixion. Sadly enough people attempt to crucify themselves with disastrous results for the Gospel. It is the old ‘works’ system under a new guise. It is because all has happened that we can live in the fruits of that act of redemption. Hence Paul can say ‘Since you then be risen with Christ’, and again, ‘In that he died, he died unto sin once: death has no more dominion over him. Likewise reckon you yourself to have died, indeed unto sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus’. How subtle is human flesh, especially religious human flesh which would ape the Cross and find itself indispensable to the fulness of salvation’

To live daily as one who has died and is risen, and so to be dead to the world, the flesh and Satan, and alive to God and righteousness, may fit under the caption of ‘The daily life of the Cross and Resurrection’, but it had better be understood that it is living in the fruits of the Cross–Resurrection event, and in no way adding to it. On this basis one can ‘put to death’ what has already been put to death and ‘put on’ the things which are part of His resurrection life. (Cf. Col. 3:110).

No wonder Paul said, ‘God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross’, and no wonder he said, ‘I resolved to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified’. No wonder, also, that he was angry with the Galatians for trying to add to grace.

The question is, ‘How many of us truly, experientially know the Christian doctrine of the atonement, and then, how many live in the good

grace, love, and power of it all?’

On the answer to this question depends the life and power of the church, or, negatively, the death of true doctrine, and the triumph of the human ego’

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