



# THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

THE DIVINE SCHEME OF RECONCILIATION  
OR  
ATONEMENT

AS ORIGINALLY PROMULGATED BY THE  
APOSTLES  
IN THE FIRST CENTURY

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2Cor. 5:19).

“By whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11).

“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin” (1Jn. 1:7).

**By ROBERT ROBERTS**

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# THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

**T**HERE is no operation of divine wisdom that has been so completely misapprehended and misrepresented as the shedding of the blood of Christ. Popular preaching brings it down to a level with the sacrifices of idolatrous superstition, by which wrathful deities are supposed to be placated by the blood of a substitutionary victim. Christ is represented as having paid our debts — as having died instead of us — as having stood in our room like a substitute in military service, or like a man rushing to the scaffold where a criminal is about to be executed, and offering to die instead of him (a favourite illustration in the evangelical pulpit).

Such views are contradicted by even the most superficial facts of the case; for if Christ died instead of us, then we ought not to die (which we do); and if he paid the penalty naturally due from us — death — he ought not to have risen (which he did). And if his death was of the character alleged, the redeeming power lay in itself and not in the resurrection that followed; whereas Paul declares to the Corinthians that, notwithstanding the death of Christ, “if Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain: ye are yet in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17).

Further, if Christ has paid our debts, our debts are not “forgiven,” for it would be out of place for a creditor to talk of having forgiven a debt which someone else has paid for the debtor; and thus is blotted out the very first feature of the gospel of the grace of God — the forgiveness of our sins “through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25).

The subject calls for great reverence of mind in order to grasp its proper apprehension: for it is a divine procedure, with divine objects. Those who have little faith in God, and little reverence for Him, can have but very small interest in it. Those who love God approach it with deep humility and fervent desire and strong interest. At the same time, it requires something besides reverence; it requires understanding. While, in a sense, all divine ways are too high for human understanding, wherein He has condescended to invite us to understand, it is ours to respond. We see many people of a reverent type of mind, even to the degree of superstition, who have no understanding.

There are two extremes which it is desirable to avoid. They may be taken to be represented by the red-hot Salvationist, and the very cool Moralistic. The Salvationist talks a great deal about “the blood of Christ,” but talks in a way that outrages understanding, and throws a cloud over God’s dealings. The Moralistic avoids reference to the blood of Christ altogether. With him it is a mere phrase without a practical meaning. Wisdom steers a middle course, and aims to get that nice equilibrium of facts which results from a comprehensive study of the scriptures.

## THE SUBJECT IN APOSTOLIC TEACHING

First, let us recognise as against the moralistic that, according to all the apostles,

the "blood of Christ" represents an integral element in the system of wisdom placed in the earth for the salvation of men, and that, therefore, if it is a something that we cannot place in our conception of man's relation to God, it is evidence that we are out of harmony with the apostolic scheme of things, and that we stand on the foundation of human thought alone, which is no foundation at all as regards futurity. There is no power in human thought to affect the future; God only can do this, and He will do it in harmony with His thoughts and not ours. Therefore wisdom lies in getting inside of His thoughts; thinking in harmony with Him, which is being "spiritually minded," the end of which is "life and peace."

Let us look into the subject in an orderly manner. Realise first, how prominent in the apostolic scheme of teaching is this subject of "the blood of Christ." We can only do this by passing in review quotations from the apostolic writings, which, though a tiresome operation to those not wise enough to be interested in the subject, is otherwise with the other class.

We have Christ's own words, in Matthew 26:28, at the breaking of bread. "This is *my blood*" he said, in handing the cup to them, "which is *shed for many*." Then Paul remarks (Heb. 10:19), "Having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by *the blood of Jesus*, by a new and living way." In Eph. 2:13, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by *the blood of Christ*." Then 1Pet. 1:2, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the spirit and *sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*." 1Jn. 1:7: "*The blood of Jesus Christ His Son* cleanseth us from all sin." Heb. 9:12, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by *his own blood* he entered in once into the holy place." Rev. 1:5, "Unto him that loved us, and hath washed us from our sins in *his own blood*." Those so referred to are described in chapter 5, verse 9, as singing together: "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by *thy blood*." Again in chapter 7, verse 14, "These are they that came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in *the blood of the Lamb*."

#### **A POSSIBILITY OF LOOKING TOO CLOSELY**

No one can think or say after the reading of these statements that a system of morality or of any kind of wisdom can be divine that leaves the blood of Christ out of sight, or attaches to it no importance. At the same time, there is a possibility of looking too closely at the expression, and thinking only of the *blood*, as some of these extreme sectarians do: "Only the blood for me," say they. What do they mean? We must open our minds to understand. Literally, the blood of Christ which was shed on Calvary would be of no use to them. It trickled down his side; it oozed from his hands and feet; it gushed from the spear gash; and fell on the ground and dried away like any other blood, and nobody could find it if they tried, and if they could, it would not be of any spiritual value. It is one of the Roman Catholic superstitions that the real blood of Christ was preserved and caught and bottled. We read in history of one of the kings of England receiving a small phial of the said liquor from the Pope, which set him up wonderfully, and led him to great religious extravagances.

There must be something wrong in such a close, limited, microscopic view. In a literal sense, the blood of Christ was the same blood as our own; as is said: "Forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of *the same*." As such, it could be of no benefit to any human being. It is not the blood as literal blood that is precious or efficacious, but its relation to something of which the blood-shedding is expressive.

## OTHER APOSTOLIC DEFINITIONS OF THE ATONEMENT

If there is anything that proves this conclusively, it is the fact that the same efficiency is associated with the *body* of Christ in apostolic phraseology. Let us see the evidence of this fact. Look at the 10th chapter of Hebrews, verse 10: "By the which will we are sanctified through *the offering of* THE BODY of Jesus Christ once for all." Then in Col. 1:21, "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled *in* THE BODY of his flesh through death." Eph. 2:16, "And that he might reconcile both unto God *in one* BODY by the cross." 1Pet. 2:24, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own BODY on the tree. 1Cor. 10:16, "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of *the body* of Christ?" And 11:29, "For he that eateth and drinketh [unworthily], eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning THE [LORD'S] BODY."

If it was all "the blood" in the way that people talk, there would be no place for this other series of expressions concerning the *body* of Christ.

There is another series of expressions which carries the same modifying consideration with it, forbidding us to confine our thoughts to the blood of Christ, or to think of it as something magical in itself, and showing us a larger thought. This expression I refer to is "Death." Begin with Heb. 9:15 — "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." Here is neither "blood" nor "body," but "death." How common is this expression; let us have a few illustrations by way of laying our foundation strongly, deeply, and surely, so as to have a scriptural conception. All unscriptural conceptions come from taking a part instead of the whole; it is like looking at a man through a microscope. You see the hills and valleys of half-an-inch of skin, but you do not see the man. That is how some people read the Scriptures. We must broaden out our views so as to take in all the elements, with the result that we shall see the whole object. Take, then, a few of these expressions. Heb. 2:9 — "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels *for the suffering of death*, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should *taste death* for every man."

Verse 14 — "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that *through death* he might destroy *him that had the power of death*, that is the devil." Rom. 5:10 — "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God *by the death* of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." 1Cor. 11:26 — "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew *the Lord's death* till he come."

Here are several synonymous expressions that demand some other understanding of the matter than that exhibited in popular preaching. Such an understanding we shall find supplied by the system of the Truth as revived in our age by the instrumentality of Dr. Thomas, giving us a simple central idea in which these various expressions converge — "The blood of Christ," "the offering of the body of Christ," "the death of Christ."

## CHRIST HIMSELF BENEFITED BY HIS OWN DEATH

Before attempting to exhibit this convergent harmony, let us notice one strong point of contrast between the popular and the scriptural view. The popular 'view' is that Christ's blood was shed that we might go free on the principle on which a man about to be beheaded has been supposed to go free if some one comes and takes his place. The day of execution arrives, and some strong lover of the doomed

man rushes forward in the crowd, and says, "Behead me instead of him." The proposal is accepted; the substitute is beheaded, and the other goes free: so Christ's blood is shed, and we go free from our condemnation. Now this cannot be the right view, for this remarkable reason, that Christ himself is exhibited to us as coming under the beneficial operation of his own death, thus: — Heb. 13:20 — "The God of peace, who brought again from the dead *our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep*, THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT." This is stated perhaps still more clearly in Heb. 9:12, in a passage we have already considered, but it has a new bearing here, — "Neither by the blood of goats or calves, but by *his own blood* he entered in once into the holy place, having *obtained eternal redemption for us*." You will observe that the two italicised words, "*for us*," are not in the original. In the Authorized Version of 1611 they are added to the translation, and they are added in defiance of grammatical propriety. In the Revised Version of 1881 they are omitted. The verb is in the middle voice, and the meaning of that is remarkable in this connection. We have no middle voice in English: we have passive or active voice: you either do or are done to in English; but in Greek, there is another voice, — a middle voice — a state of the verb in which you do a thing to yourself. "Having obtained *in himself* eternal redemption." In Phil. 2:8 we have the idea more literally expressed — "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him*." Orthodox conceptions of this subject leave no room for the idea that Christ was benefited by his own death, and exalted by reason of his submission.

#### THE MEANING OF IT ALL

What is the meaning of all this? for as yet we have only been dealing with fragments of the subject. The testimonies submitted create a situation of enquiry, and enable us to open our minds. In pursuing the enquiry, we must remember this, that the death of Christ was preceded by a shadow institution from which much of the phraseology was derived. Under that shadow institution, the sacrifice of Christ took place. To see the beginning and full scope of the thing, we have to note the history as divinely written, that Abel offered sacrifice at the gates of Eden; Noah offered acceptable sacrifice after the flood. Abraham is frequently exhibited in the same act and attitude, calling on the name of God in connection with the offering of the bodies of slain beasts. The Israelites in Egypt, on the destructive visitation upon the Egyptians, were to be spared, on condition of killing a lamb, and sprinkling the door-posts with its blood. In the law of Moses, we have the blood of bulls and goats all the way through.

In the apostolic writings, we are pointed back and told that all these things were shadows, figures beforehand of what God purposed to accomplish in relation to us in His Son. So we look at the shadow first, and we ask, Why did God require sacrifice to be offered at the hands of those who approached Him? He has given His reason; He never does anything without a reason; and in the Prophets, He often asks Israel to consider His reasons. Sometimes it is a part of duty to submit and obey where no reason is given, and even where we do not understand. Yet understanding is at the basis of all His appointments, as it is at the basis of all His works in Nature. And where He gives us a reason, it is ours thankfully and reverently to discern it, that, as He says, we may not be like the horse or the mule which have no understanding.

#### THE SHADOW INSTITUTION

Look, then, at Lev. 17: here we get something more than a glimmer through a

crevice in the dark wall. Verse 11: "For *the life of the flesh is in the blood*: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls (*lives*): for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul (*life*)." And verse 14, "For it (the blood) is *the life* of all flesh... for the *life* of all flesh is *the blood* thereof." Here is life as the leading element of blood employed as a ritual agent.

How does this help us? By connecting it with another divine principle illustrated at the beginning. Paul gives it to us plainly thus: "The wages of sin is death." The historic illustration of this statement is this: "Because thou hast done this," — that is, sinned — that is, disobeyed divine command — "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, until thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This is death. And now, had God closed the book there, with this sentence of death, the only thing left for us would be to die. But God did not close the book there. He did not leave man to himself. At the very crisis of transgression and condemnation, He provided a shadow institution, by which, notwithstanding his alienated and condemned position, man might approach God acceptably, in hope of the rectification of his position in a far-off day. He appointed that he should lay his hands on the head of an animal, confess his sins, and kill it and take its blood, and offer it to God. The poured out blood was the offered life. It was the ritual recognition and declaration by the worshipper that he was under condemnation, and had no right to his life. He acknowledged this in coming to God in this appointed way: and God was pleased.

#### **THE POWERLESSNESS OF ANIMAL BLOOD**

Yet Paul says, "The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin," while the blood of Christ can. So here is another problem which we enquire into. The problem is this, Why could not the blood of bulls and of goats take away sin, seeing the shedding thereof was apparently as much a confession and abjuration of sin on the part of the offerer as the man who comes to God through the shed blood of Christ? We find the key to this problem in the expression made use of by Paul concerning the death of Christ in Rom. 3:21-22, "The righteousness of God without the law is manifested in Christ." Verse 25, "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, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." If we ponder this, we shall find it yields a complete explanation. First of all, it places forgiveness in the foreground, "through God's forbearance," which is at variance with the substitutionary idea. The substitutionary idea blots out forgiveness by suggesting that the debt in the case is paid by another. It is not so. God does forgive: this is the most prominent feature in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel. — "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." "Be ye baptized for the remission of sins." "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

#### **THE CONDITIONS OF FORGIVENESS**

But then forgiveness hath its conditions. God does not offer forgiveness indiscriminately; He does not say He will forgive the sins of the world, whether they take notice of Him or not. Very far from this: He restricts forgiveness to those who fear Him and submit to the conditions He has provided. The question is, what are those conditions? There are various conditions, but we look not now at subsidiary conditions, but at the one that comes before all others, as brought forward by Paul in the declaration before us — the propitiatory setting forth of

Christ as an object of faith in the shedding of his blood. It is forgiveness that is offered, but not without this, — not apart from this. But now comes the question, why is the death of Christ a sufficient foundation for the forgiveness of sin unto life eternal, when the death of animals was not so? We find the answer in the statement that the death of Christ was “to declare the righteousness of God” as the ground of the exercise of His forbearance. That is to say, God maintains His own righteousness and His own supremacy while forgiving us: and exacts the recognition of them and submission to them, as the condition of the exercise of His forbearance in the remission of our sins. Now as we look at Christ, we find in his death the declaration of that righteousness. When we look at the killing of a lamb or of an animal of any kind, it is not a declaration of the righteousness of God that we see except in shadow, in type, in figure: the animal had done no wrong, and in the abstract, there would be wrong and not righteousness in punishing one for the sin of another. The death of Christ was “that God might be just” while acting the part of justifier or forgiver. The sacrifice of animals did not illustrate this, except typically and preliminarily. It did not exhibit the righteousness of God except in the prophetic sense; it was a *type* of the true exhibition of God’s righteousness that God would accomplish in the Lamb of His own providing. “God shall provide Himself a lamb, my son,” said Abraham to Isaac. He spoke by the Spirit of God, pointing forward; and when Jesus appeared, John said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

#### IN WHAT WAY IS THE ATONEMENT EFFICACIOUS?

We must fix our attention on Christ in this character, with the view of being able to see in what way the righteousness of God was declared in the crucifixion of a guileless and sinless and perfect man. We must first of all ask who he was. It is a ready and scriptural answer, so far as it goes, to say, he was the Son of God. But he was more than this. His being this alone would not have qualified him for the work of declaring the righteousness of God in being sacrificed. He was likewise the Son of Man through birth of a woman. Although he is called the second or last Adam, he was not a new Adam: he was not made fresh from the ground as Adam was. He was not of angelic nature; he was not in any physical sense apart from us. Born of woman, born of our stock, he is introduced to notice in the very first verse in the apostolic writings, as “the son of David, and the son of Abraham.” As Paul says, “the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3), or, as in Heb. 2:14, partaker of the same flesh and blood, that *through death* he might annul, destroy, neutralize, that which is destroying us all.

Now what is that? To see this, we must go back again to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and see him condemned to death. The effect of such a sentence upon a creature we see illustrated in Gehazi as he stood before Elisha. “The leprosy of Naaman cleave to thee and to thy seed for ever.” That was the sentence, “and he went from his presence a leper as white as snow.” The word of Elisha took effect, and became leprosy. The word of God to Adam took effect, and made him a death-stricken man; he was not subject to death before, for sin was the door by which death came in. “By one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*.” “By man came death.” “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” He was not to be killed straightway, — “Thou *shalt*.” God’s purpose with man required a slow death, because His purpose was to bring great good out of the evil, and, by two sinners, to bring forth a righteous multitude. Therefore He produced slow death, by establishing a law that would work it out. It is like fixing an alarm clock, the

mechanism of which is adjusted to the time it is required to go off. The Word of God against Adam made him a mortal man with a mortal body. Look at Adam and Eve, mortal. Bye and bye there are children; what are they? Just the same: they also are mortal. Could a mortal beget an immortal? "Mortal" means deathful, the word comes from a Latin word, *mors* — death, and is imported into the English language, but in plain Saxon, it is "deathful." Why deathful? Because of Adam's sin.

### VERY SIMPLE, VERY REASONABLE

It is all very simple, and it is all very reasonable. As to the simplicity, the great verities of the universe are all simple. What is simpler than letting fresh air in by a gullet to give us life? Choke up the gullet with a bit of tough beef, and where is your philosopher? Gone as clean as the meanest strangled rat or rabbit. The high-stepping mightinesses of philosophy are absurd. The great facts of God are simple, and it is our business to "receive them as little children."

As to the reasonableness, since God has given us a power of choice, and since this power is capable of being used with great mischief, is it not good and even necessary that God should tell us how to use it? and is it not necessary that His command in the case should be of an imperative obligation? Ought not His will to be the supreme law of life? and ought not insubordination to be insufferable? Is it not defensible on every ground that the wages of sin should be death? There is only one answer to all these questions: and that answer brings the heartiest endorsement of the ways of God, and the severest rebuke on the shallow presumption that would criticize and disparage those ways.

"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death hath passed upon all men for that all have sinned." Now, how was this state of things to be remedied? There were three ways of mending it. One way was to exterminate the whole human species. But this would have been a poor remedy. It would have been to confess failure: — that God had set going an arrangement on this planet for His glory and could not make it work. This was impossible. God has said that He has not made the earth in vain: that He formed it to be inhabited by the righteous: and that as truly as He lives, it will be wholly filled with His glory yet. The second way would have been what might be called the toleration-of-sin method — the universal and indiscriminating pity method, by which the wickedness of disobedience should have been ignored, and mankind allowed to occupy the earth immortally for their own pleasure. But this also was impossible. It would have meant God's abdication, and the handing over of man to eternal misery. There was a third way — a middle way, and that is the way which has been adopted — namely, to enforce the law against sin, and at the same time leave the door open for mercy to repentant and obedient sinners. How such a method could be made consistent with itself has been exhibited to us in the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ.

*He was born that he might die*, as the first necessity in the case; for thus was the righteousness of God to be declared, and sin condemned in its own flesh as the foundation of all the goodness to come afterwards. It may be asked, could not such a result have been achieved by the sacrificial immolation of any sinner? So far as the mere condemnation of sin was concerned, no doubt the lesson could have been thus enforced; but as in all the works of God, there were more objects than one. Not only had sin to be condemned, but resurrection had to come in harmony with the law that made death the wages of sin; and this resurrection was not merely to be a

restoration of life, but the providing of an Administrator of the glorious results to be achieved — the raising up of one who should be a mediator between God and man, the dispenser of the forgiveness and the salvation of God through him, and the Judge also of who should be fit to receive these great gifts. All these aims required that the sacrificial victim should be *a perfectly righteous man*, as well as the possessor of the nature to be sacrificially condemned — who should do no sin himself, while “made sin” and treated as sin for us; who should be just and holy, obedient in all things, while yet “numbered with the transgressors, and making his grave with the wicked.”

### **BEGOTTEN OF GOD, YET SON OF ADAM**

Consequently, it required God’s interposition in the way recorded by the apostles. “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee (Mary); the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lk. 1:35). Thus God “sent forth His Son *made of a woman* made under the law” (Gal. 4:4). Being made of a woman, he was of our nature — our condemned and weak and mortal nature: but, being begotten of God, and not of man, he was in character spotless — “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” Sin had hold of him in his nature, which inherited the sentence of death from Adam: but it had no hold of him in his character: for he always did those things that were pleasing to his Father. When he died, “he died unto sin once.” But God raised him because of his obedience, and, “being raised from the dead, he dieth no more: death hath no more dominion over him” (Rom. 6:10-9). “Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). So we may triumphantly enquire with Paul in Rom. 8:33: “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is ever at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

It was a spiritual necessity that he should partake of our nature. It is expressly said that he did, and John says that any man who denies it, as many did in his day, and many have done since, denies the truth, and is indeed anti-Christ. He is strong in maintaining that Jesus came in the flesh, that is, the flesh of the children, the flesh of David — flesh mortal because of sin. Why does he take this strong ground? Because the denial of it cuts at the root of God’s arrangement of wisdom and righteousness. It destroys the very principle that made it impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sin. The object was that God’s righteousness might have full play in advancing to our salvation. Christ could not righteously die if death had no dominion over him, and it could not have this dominion except through Adam, through Abraham, David, and his mother, for he had no sin of his own: it was the sin of others that was on him. It was his mission to take this away: how could he do this if it were not on him? “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,” a figure of speech, because God proposed to forgive us all for Christ’s sake. Still, in this very real sense, our sins are considered as being laid on him, and the beginning was made by making him of the same death-inheriting nature from Eden. The whole process was conducted in harmony with God’s plan of righteousness in every item. The plan required that the sufferer, while himself in the channel of death so far as nature was concerned, should himself not be a sinner, that he should be the Lamb of God, without spot, undefiled. Such an one could only be provided by what God did. God went out of His way to provide such a man. The

man produced through Mary, by the Spirit of God, combined the two essential qualifications for a sacrifice; he was the very nature condemned in Eden, and therefore wrong was not done when he was impaled upon the cross. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." Would it please the Lord to do iniquity? Nay. Therefore it was right. But how could it be right unless he were the very condemned stock?

### NO NEED FOR BEING SHOCKED

Some say, "We are shocked at the idea of Christ being under the dominion of death in any sense or way." Well, then, you must be shocked at what Paul says — "Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more, death hath *no more dominion* over him. For in that he died, he *died unto sin* once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Thus it is the apostolic definition and declaration that death once had dominion over him. Surely, there is no need for being shocked, when the meaning of the matter is perceived. On the contrary, the spiritual understanding can see and admire, and bow down, and worship through Christ, at the spectacle of God's love advancing without the compromise of God's dignity. Some people may say, "God is love, and does not stand upon His dignity." What do such people think of this then? — "If ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor: will he be pleased with thee or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts." "Cursed be the deceiver that hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and offereth unto the Lord a corrupt thing; for *I am a great King*, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is dreadful among the heathen." By which illustration — and it is God's own illustration — we are let into the idea that God expects to be honoured as the first condition of acceptable approach, as He says, "A son honoureth his father and a servant his master. If then I be a father, where is mine honour? If I be a master, where is my fear?" It is a universal rule that etiquette must be observed in human intercourse; it is empty mostly, but there is a real etiquette which is essential. There are ways of acting that are inconsistent with authority. Here then, is God, the great, the holy, the wise, the omnipotent; and here are we, the small, sinful, foolish, and the weak creatures of His hand, who have set Him at nought, and whom, if He were to stand upon His rights, He would destroy in a moment, and have nothing more to do with us. How can He be so kind and gracious and long-suffering, and permit us to approach Him, without vindicating His righteousness, and asserting His greatness? He cannot; He does not. It is in Christ crucified that we are invited. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," but not without condemning sin in a federal representative. The human race is, as it were, crucified in His Son. In Christ crucified, man is put down, man is killed; God is exalted and glorified.

### HEAVEN'S ETIQUETTE

This is Heaven's etiquette, and the appointed manner of approach for sinners, combining supremacy and love. "I am a great King." He will forgive and be forbearing if we bow down in the presence of His vindicated righteousness — a righteousness in which kindness and justice converge, which cannot be said for substitution. It would not be righteous to put to death one on whom death had no claims. It would not be kindness to say to us, "I will let you go free if that man will die." The kindness, wisdom, and righteousness of God are all obscured by any idea of that sort; but the scriptural idea is a masterpiece, a triumph of divine wisdom. God says now: "If you will recognise your position, repent, and come under that man's wing, I will receive you back to favour and forgive you. My righteousness has been declared in him; I have crowned him with everlasting days; because he

loved righteousness and hated iniquity, and was obedient unto death, I have crowned him with life eternal. It is in him for you if you will submit, and believe in him, and put on his name, which is a confession that you have no name of your own that will stand. Obey his commandments, and I will receive you and forgive you for his sake, and ye shall be My sons and daughters." This is a splendid issue of kindness and wisdom. It is a different thing from the dry legality that would give us the blood of Christ as a sort of precious stuff, with which to touch ourselves and be pure. God operates in the whole transaction. We are cleansed from sin by this beautiful means, that God forgives us because of what Christ has done, if we will accept him and be baptised. In baptism we are provided with a ceremony in which we are baptised into his death, and in which, by a figure, we are washed from our sins in his blood. There is a connection in this view of the case, between what God offers us in Christ, and our own acts. That is, the cleansing result of the atonement is dependent upon our compliances. You remember the expression — "*If we walk in the light* the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." If we do not walk in the light, it has no power, which shows that the blood of Christ is not the magical thing represented by orthodox religion; nor the automatic legally operative thing to which it is degraded by some theories; nor the powerless thing thought of by mere moralists, who put the blood of Christ entirely to one side. It is the ritual element in the act or ceremony which the living, loving, wise Author of the universe has established as the basis of reconciliation between Himself and those who have wandered far from Him into the ways of death. It is He who applies the results on faith being exercised in His appointment. It is the expression of His justice in the process of justifying those who believe.

#### **THE PLACE OF FORGIVENESS**

The object of this sacrificial declaration of the righteousness of God is also made clearly manifest in its practical applications. It was "for (or in order to) the remission of sins that are past," that is, where men believe — "Remission," not as a legal right accruing, but as the gift of grace, "through the forbearance of God." There would be no "forbearance" if a legal claim had been discharged. God "forgives for Christ's sake" (Eph. 4:32). This is the literal issue of the whole matter. God's supremacy having been vindicated, a foundation has been laid on which He can offer forgiveness without the compromise of wisdom and righteousness. He does not offer it, or allow it apart from submission to the declaration of His righteousness in Christ crucified. There must be the most humble identification with that declaration. Baptism in our age is provided as the means of that identification. The believer is "baptised into his death" (Rom. 6:3), and buried with him in baptism (Col. 2:12), and receives the forgiveness of all his sins "through the forbearance (the kindness, the graciousness) of God," who is pleased with our conformity to the form of humiliation He has provided. The whole sacrificial institution and our endorsement of it in baptism is comparable to a form of apology presented by the Majesty of Heaven as the condition of our receiving His mercy unto life eternal. The object secured is the triumphant assertion and recognition of God's supremacy and man's abasement as a dependent beneficiary. Thus law and mercy are reconciled.

Thus the meaning of the death of Christ falls easily within the definition that has been supplied to us in the words of inspiration. That definition satisfies all the demands of the understanding, reconciling every apparently discordant element in the case. It occurs twice in the course of Paul's letter to the Romans — in two

different forms that exhibit the whole case. Both forms have been frequently on our lips in the course of these remarks; but they bear repeating. In the first, he says it was to “declare His (God’s) righteousness for (and in order to) the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25), and in the second, he says it “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). The crucifixion of Christ as a “declaration of the righteousness of God” and a “condemnation of sin in the flesh,” exhibited to the world the righteous treatment of sin. It was as though it was proclaimed to all the world, when the body was nailed to the cross: “This is how condemned human nature should be treated according to the righteousness of God; it is fit only for destruction.” The shedding of the blood was the ritual symbol of that truth; for the shedding of the blood was the taking away of the life. Such a declaration of the righteousness of God could only be made in the very nature concerned; a body under the dominion of death because of sin. It would not have been a declaration of the righteousness of God to have crucified an angel or a new man made fresh from the ground. There would have been confusion in such an operation. This is why it was necessary that Jesus should be “made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3), that he might partake of the very flesh and blood of man (Heb. 2:14). It was that nature that was to be operated upon and redeemed in him. It was needful that he should at the first “come in the flesh.” This is where the gnostic heresy of the first century condemned by John (1Jn. 4:3) was so disastrous to the scheme of God’s wisdom in Christ. They denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, which obscured the lesson taught and the object aimed at in the sacrifice of Christ. This also is the effect of the orthodox doctrine of substitution.

There is another aspect of the death of Christ which it is not needful to enter into in this place. It is the aspect involved in Paul’s statement that “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.” The foregoing remarks have dealt mainly with the hereditary death taint derived from Adam, but there was, additional to this, the condemnation of the law of Moses, under which Christ could not be brought by birth; he was born under the law but not condemned by the law unless he broke the law. If he had broken the law, he would have ceased to be an acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world. Yet, if the curse of the law did not come upon him, he could not take that curse away. What we might call the difficulty of this case was met by the mode of his death, in which, without any delinquency on his part, but rather by an act of obedience, he was brought under the curse of the law by the mode of his death, brought under that curse without fault, but rather by virtue, and redeemed from it by resurrection. So much is sufficient to say on that point in this place.

### **THE DIVINE SIDE OF CHRIST**

Thus far we have considered the human side of the atonement, as we might express it. We have not ignored the divine side by any means, but there is a closer and a higher view of the divine side that is essential to a complete view of the case. It is a view that is a little difficult to formulate in a palpable manner for the reason appearing in Isaiah 55, that God’s ways and thoughts are as high above ours as the heaven is high above the earth. Because this is the case, and because the whole work of atonement or reconciliation through Christ is a work of God, it necessarily embodies ideas too high and too subtle for mortal mind to easily apprehend or appreciate.

Nowhere does this aspect of the case come out more strikingly than in the beginning of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. Here, in the first chapter, there occur the following beautiful verses: "Not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is, to them that perish, foolishness, but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God... We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God... God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are, *that no flesh should glory in His presence*. But of Him are ye in Christ who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption, that according as it is written, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord" (1Cor. 1:17, 23-31).

The great feature of these declarations is that Christ is the work of God in a sense in which man is not, that the glory of the triumph wrought out in him may be to God, and that human nature may have no room for the complacent self-credit which is so common with man. To see the full force of this idea we must realise the divine side of Christ. In all the discourses of Christ, the Father is brought forward as the great initiator and operator in the case. This is his style of language: "I came down from Heaven not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me" (Jn. 6:38). "I am not come of myself" (Jn. 6:28). "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works" (Jn. 14:10). "I am come in my Father's name" (Jn. 5:43). "I can of mine own self do nothing" (Jn. 5:30). "He that sent me is with me" (Jn. 8:29). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. How sayest thou, then, shew us the Father" (Jn. 14:9). So with the apostles: Paul speaks (Eph. 1:5) of the Father, "*having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to HIMSELF according to the good pleasure of His will*." Again he says (Rom. 3:23), "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified FREELY BY HIS GRACE *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*." And again, in the 11th chapter of the same epistle, at the 32nd verse: "God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all." Again, in his second letter to the Corinthians (vv. 18-19), he tells us that *God hath reconciled us unto HIMSELF by Jesus Christ*; and that *God was in Christ*, reconciling the world UNTO HIMSELF. And again, in his letter to Titus (3:4): "The *kindness and love of GOD our SAVIOUR* toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, *but according to HIS MERCY*, He saved us." And in chap. 2:11: "For the *GRACE OF GOD that bringeth salvation* hath appeared to all men."

### THE GRACIOUS ACT OF GOD

It is the grace of God, then — the act of God — that we see in the introduction of Christ upon the scene to open a way for mercy conformably with wisdom and justice. This required that he should appear in the nature of Abraham and David, which was sinful nature. How then, some say, was he, with sinful flesh, to be sinless? God's relation to the matter is the answer. God did it. The weak flesh could not do it. Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, that the glory might be to God. The light in his face is the light of the Father's glory. As to how the Father could be manifest in a man with an independent volition, we need not trouble ourselves. We are ignorant as to how the Father performs any of the myriad wonders of His power

— so small a matter as the *modus operandi* of the germination of the grain in the field to its multiplication twenty-fold is a mystery. We know a thousand things as facts, but we are utterly ignorant of the mode of invisible working by which these facts have their existence. We receive them, though we do not understand them. If it be so with things in nature, our inability to define or conceive the process need be no difficulty in the way of receiving a heavenly fact, not only commended to us on the best of all testimony, but self-manifest before us. For who can contemplate the superhuman personage exhibited in the gospel narrative without seeing that the Father is manifest in him? When did ever man deport himself like this man? When spoke the most gifted of men like this? Is he not manifestly revealed the moral and intellectual image of the invisible God? Is he not — last Adam though he be — is he not “the Lord from heaven”? But what are we to say to the plain declaration emanant from the mouth of the Lord himself, that the beholder looking on him, saw the Father, and that the Father within him by the Spirit — (for as he said on the subject of eating his flesh, it is the Spirit that maketh alive: the flesh profiteth nothing) — was the doer and the speaker? The answer of wisdom is, that we must simply believe; and true wisdom will gladly believe in so glorious a fact. What if our understanding be baffled? Shall we refuse to eat bread because we fail to comprehend the essences in which the flour subsists? A childlike faith is alone acceptable in this matter. The words used by Jesus to his disciples we may presume to be applicable to us, if they are true of us: “The Father Himself loveth you because ye believe that I came out from God.” Those who make the mistake of the Pharisees, and “judge after the flesh,” stand back in gloomy quandary and talk of “mere man:” others who think to make a great mystery “simple” and plain, speak of the flesh of Christ as a mixture of human with “divine substance.” Wisdom takes her stand between the two, and seeks to dive no deeper than the testimony that God was manifest in Jesus, and that Jesus was of our nature, and “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” as Paul declares, and “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.”

### SIN IN THE FLESH

Some experience distress at the association of Jesus with sinful flesh in any sense. They seek relief in the expression of Rom. 8, that God sent His own Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Let us consider this. What is this “likeness?” Moses informs us (Gen. 5:3) that Adam begat a son in his own image and likeness. You would not say the word “likeness” means that Seth was, in any wise, different from Adam. There is the word “image.” Suppose the word “image” had been used in this remark of Paul’s: “sent His Son in the image of the earthy nature.” We should then have had this argument — “Ah, you see it is only *the image*; it is not the nature itself.” Whereas, Paul says concerning ourselves in 1Cor. 15:49: “We have borne *the image of the earthy*, and shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Shall we say we have not borne *the earthy*? Do not we bear *the earthy*? Yes. Therefore in apostolic language “earthy” and “the image of the earthy” mean the *same thing*. Upon the same principle, *sinful flesh* and *the likeness of sinful flesh* mean the same thing. And we shall find that the same they are.

And now we have to consider in what sense did Christ come in sinful flesh. There are two things involved in these expressions that require carefully separating in order to understand their bearing on the questions that have been raised. Sin, in the primary and completest sense, is disobedience. In this sense, there was no sin in Christ. But where is the source of disobedience? In the inclinations that are

inherent in the flesh. Without these, there would be no sin. Hence it is (because they are the cause of sin) that they are sometimes spoken of as sin. As where Paul speaks in Rom. 7 of "Sin that dwelleth in me" and "The motions of sin in my members," etc. These inclinations are so described in contrast to the spirit nature in which there are no inclinations leading to sin. It is only in this sense that Christ "was made sin," which Paul states (2Cor. 5:21). He was made in all points like to his brethren, and therefore of a nature experiencing the infirmities leading to temptation: "Tempted in all points like them, but without sin." All this is testified (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). He has also come under the dominion of sin in coming under the hereditary power of death which is the wages of sin. He was in this sense made part of the sin-constitution of things, deriving from his mother both the propensities that lead to sin and the sentence of death that was passed because of sin. He was himself absolutely sinless as to disobedience, while subject to the impulses and the consequences of sin. The object was to open a way out of this state, both for himself and his brethren, by death and resurrection after trial. It pleased God to require the ceremonial condemnation of this sin-nature in crucifixion in the person of a righteous possessor of it, as the basis of our forgiveness.

There are those who, without intending it, place themselves in antagonism to the testimony in affirming that, while Jesus came in the flesh, it was not in flesh "sinful in its tendency as ours." The testimony is that he was "tempted in all points" as ourselves, which could not have been the case in the absence of the susceptibilities which our correspondent denies. The very essence of temptation is susceptibility to wrong suggestion. The victory lies in the opposing considerations brought to bear. The truth of the matter does not depend upon the word "likeness" or any other single term, but upon the combination of statements made — which are all in language plain enough to be free from obscurity. At the same time it has to be pointed out that the word "likeness" in Greek has the force of resemblance so complete as to be sameness. This is illustrated in the statement that Jesus was made in "the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). The extent of the likeness is defined as extending to "all points" and "all things" (Paul's words — Heb. 2:17; 4:15). What can we say but that he was a man, and not the mere likeness of a man?

But then, it is said, "Surely he was made superior to man in some respects." Unquestionably. He was not mere man — not a mere Jew — not mere flesh. He was the flesh of Abraham in a special form. Objectors well say that "a mere ordinary man would have failed." True, but wherein did the extraordinariness consist? It is here where they get on to the wrong line. They make Christ of different stuff — "flesh not sinful in its tendency." They should rather realise that he was the same stuff specially organised and specially used, having the same inherent qualities tending to temptation and death; but qualified to overcome both by the superior power derived from his paternity. Much of the difficulty in the understanding of this subject arises from a wrong assumption on what we may call the natural history side of human nature. It seems to be imagined that all human beings are necessarily on the same level of moral imbecility. This is far from the case, as we know from experience. All human beings would be equally incapable on all points if all were equally left untended from the cradle. They could all be speechless idiots without exception if suckled and cradled up by beasts, as has happened in rare instances. But the difference made by instruction and training makes all the difference in the world between two men both equally human: one shall be a stolid brute, and the other verging upon the grace and intelligence of angelhood.

But this is not the only difference. Though all men are equally human on certain main points, there are fundamental differences arising from parentage. Two boys — one an Indian cross-breed, and the other a European — may be brought up in the same family, sent to the same school, and will turn out totally different men — one stupid and barren and intractable, and the other bright and fertile and docile. They are both human, but they both differ radically. How fallacious it would be to reason from one to the other on the ground of both possessing a common human nature. They are both human truly, but humanity of very different qualities.

To say that Christ was a man partaking of our sinful nature does not mean that he was the same sort of man as other men. His parentage and education were both divine; and as it was said, "Never man spake like this man," so it has to be said that never man thought as this man, or loved as this man, or felt as this man. He was a special man altogether, though as to nature the same; just as a special vase, got up and gilt for a royal table, is a different article from a common mug, though made, it may be, of the same china clay.

It is impossible not to respect the spirit and intent of many who do not share these views. There are men with almost agonizing sincerity of purpose who cannot see through the fogs that envelop the truth in an age when there is no living voice of authoritative guidance, and when the power of correctly interpreting the written Word is the only rule of conviction. It is natural to wish to think that in such a situation of divine truth on the earth, the same consideration will at the last be shown towards those who earnestly do their best in the dimness, that was shown, on the intercession of Hezekiah, towards the multitude in Israel who "had not cleansed themselves, and yet did eat the Passover *otherwise than it was written*" (2Chr. 30:18). God is not unrighteous or unreasonable. At the same time, in such a situation, when the truth can with difficulty be kept alive at all, it is not for those who know the truth to work by a *may be*. We must be governed by what is revealed, leaving the Lord to revoke the present rule of probation, or make His own allowances in its application.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING**

It is important to understand these things, because they qualify us for acceptable approach to God, and they work out the right result in character and daily life. In dealing even with great men, you are unacceptable if you do not enter into the spirit and aim of their etiquette; how much more with God, who "taketh not pleasure in fools" and in men "that have no understanding." In our approaches to Him in prayer, we must understand that though He is kind and gracious, He makes no compromises of the greatness of His way, but will be "sanctified in them that approach unto Him." We must also understand that we can establish no claim; this passing by of our sins is the act of His forbearance; that no debt of ours has been paid or can be paid; that what the death of Christ has done has been to declare God's righteousness that we may, by taking part in it, receive God's free forgiveness through him. Thus God in all things is glorified. The orthodox theology of the day generates an offensive spirit of presumption.

#### **EFFECT ON CHARACTER**

So also do wrong views on this subject interfere with a proper development of character. The idea that Christ has borne our punishment and paid our debts, and that his righteousness is placed to our credit, and that all we have to do is to believe it, is demoralizing. It nullifies that other most important element of the truth, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God, and that he only is righteous

who doeth righteousness. It draws a veil over the truth that we have to "work out our salvation" by a "patient continuance in well-doing," and that he only that endureth to the end shall be saved. It undermines that most important testimony of the Gospel that Christ is the Judge of who is fit to be saved, and that he will impartially give to every man according to his works. These blighting results are to be witnessed in all communities where the doctrine of a substitutionary sacrifice and an imputed righteousness holds sway. Where there is any robust righteousness of character exhibited, where any true holiness of life — it is where the purifying truth is discerned, believed, and cherished in daily Bible reading and prayer. The truth is a beautiful and perfect whole. The sacrifice of Christ, at first a mystery to the natural mind, becomes lucid and glorious as a sunbeam of life and light. Enveloped in the clouds of false thoughts and theories, it is hidden as entirely from view as if it had never been preached.

### **THE FINAL TRIUMPH**

The final triumph will show us at the end a generation of Adam's race brought from the grave, belonging to different ages, having lived in different circumstances, but all related to the same hereditary evil, and who all in their several days overcame by the same power, the power of the truth testified to them, and the power of God's will declared to them, and submitted to by them. They pleased God by their faith and submission, and Christ comes and gathers them all to himself. This is the final aim of the Gospel, that all the children of God might be gathered together in one, and formed into one society, one family, all developed on one principle. No neutrals amongst them; all of them men and women of love, shown by the obedience of faith, all of them tried men and women, humble and humbled; not only invited to come as little children, but helped to be such by tribulation and chastisement; all of them then perfected, for death is obliterated as entirely from their nature as it has been from Christ's, whom God did not allow to remain in death more than three days, and then took him away to Himself, where he has been basking in the sunshine of His glorious presence. When Moses came down from the mount, his face shone; when Christ comes forth from the Father's presence, he will come forth resplendent with the Father's glory. His people will be gathered together to him; in his presence they will forget their sorrows. Is any grieving at the wrongs of the spiritual situation as it now exists? Wait — it cannot be otherwise at present. By-and-bye we shall be introduced to a company, every one of whom will be a glowing ember of divine fire, every one a perfected son or daughter, with immortal nature, which disease can never touch, which can never faint nor fail. Oh, the joy of identification with them! On the question of how they come there, their minds fix with one accord upon the central figure and they say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood: blessing and honour and glory and power be unto him that sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever." It is beautiful to look forward to; soothing and inspiring and encouraging and purifying. "The redeemed of the Lord shall come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads"; the joy everlasting, because pure, and based upon divine righteousness, which God Himself has given to us; first through Moses, and then through Christ, who shall at last be pointed to as having taken away the sin of the world, and all its evil consequences.

*The Blood of Christ* was published by Brother Roberts in March 1895, as a synthesis of the fundamental aspects of Bible doctrine about salvation through Christ. It succinctly explains why the substitutionary and ransom theories of atonement are untenable, and presents the apostolic definitions concerning sin and sacrifice. The fact that Christ himself benefited by his own death is illustrated by reference to Hebrews 9:12 and 13:20; the role of the Mosaic sacrifices as a “shadow institution,” their inefficacy and typical nature in the removal of sin, the conditions of true forgiveness, and the sacrifice of Christ as a declaration of God’s righteousness — are all considered and explained without ambiguity.

The article fulfilled an urgent need at the time in the face of encroaching apostasy, and was designed to summarise the central elements of the Truth. It remains an important document establishing the foundation principles embraced in “the Name of Jesus Christ.”

*The Blood of Christ* correctly demonstrates that the sacrifice of Christ was for the redemption of the race, and was required because of the nature he bore, providing for the purging of the sin propensities resident therein through his birth.

Further articles on this subject are to be found in the volume *The Atonement: Salvation Through the Blood of Christ*, obtainable from the *Logos Office*, Box 220, Findon, South Australia 5023.

**LOEWS**