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## ATONEMENT BY BLOOD.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

SOME years ago I had an opportunity of going to see Dore's great picture, "Christ leaving the Prætorium." We were given a card on our entrance and were told where to stand, so that we might look at the picture from the standpoint of the artist.

There is a perspective in art, so that people who look at pictures may be able as far as possible to appreciate them from the point of view of the man who painted them; there is also a perspective in literature, whereby a person who reads a book is enabled to see something of the author's purpose, and through such perspective to understand his meaning of it. There is also a perspective in the Bible, and I want to suggest that perhaps the most important standpoint from which to view the Bible is that of sacrifice. It would seem as though sacrifice gives us the proper perspective from which to view the whole content of Scripture from Genesis to The Revelation.

My subject is concerned with this great reality of sacrifice.

### I.

#### I. THE NEED OF THE ATONEMENT,

First of all, I wish to say a word or two about the *need* of sacrifice and the need of Atonement. In order to realize the need of sacrifice, we must think very definitely about the fact of sin. Sin implies, as we know, the consciousness of God's law; then the consciousness of our obligation to that law; and then the consciousness that that law has been broken. And the result that I desire to emphasize for a moment is, that we are conscious of what has been brought before us—guilt, which is one of those fundamental elements of human life that cannot in any way be explained, still less gotten rid of.

We have a great deal of discussion to-day in regard to what is called evolution, the development of the human being and the human race, but there is one fact that militates against many of these theories, that of guilt, which is humanly irremediable and humanly irreversible. Guilt is one of the fundamental realities

<sup>1</sup> An address given at a Conference on Fundamentals held in Philadelphia.

which testify to the fact and awfulness of sin. And what is the result of sin? You have already heard it. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Death in the Bible is threefold; and it is always separation—never annihilation. There is physical death—the separation of the soul from the body. There is spiritual death—the separation of the soul from God. There is everlasting death—in the full meaning of the term—the separation of the soul and body, hereafter, from God.

When we go into detail we notice there are three main results of sin. There is the *penalty* of sin, with its consciousness of a *burden*; there is the *power* of sin, with its consciousness of *bondage*; and there is the *presence* of sin, with its consciousness of a *barrier*. It is essential that these should be taken away. The *burden* must be removed by *forgiveness*, the *bondage* must be removed by *freedom*, and the *barrier* must be removed by *fellowship*.

This is the Bible view of sin, and it needs to be emphasized, because superficial ideas of sin carry with them superficial ideas of sacrifice. It is a long time ago now since a well-known scholar, Robertson Smith, said that the fundamental idea of sacrifice is communion, the eating with the Deity; and this view captivated the minds of many different scholars, with the result that there has been an almost universal teaching of this thought.

But all the while the Bible said something different and deeper. It emphasizes not communion, but *expiation*, as the fundamental idea of sacrifice, and this is supported by the most recent researches. The Bible has always had something to say for itself in regard to sacrifice, and all through the ages it has been right on this point, as it has been right on every other.

What, then, is sin? It is a *debt* that needs to be paid; it is a *degradation* that needs to be removed; it is a *defilement* that needs to be cleansed; it is a *darkness* that needs to be lighted; it is a *disease* that needs to be healed; it is a *death* that needs to be *abolished*.

## II. THE MEANS OF THE ATONEMENT.

Now, second, we come to the *means* of sacrifice. Sacrifice is necessary, for we are told in Hebrews ix. 22, "without shedding of blood is no remission." What is the source of sacrifice? Where

did sacrifice originate? The Bible does not tell us. The first account we have of sacrifice is, as you know, in the story of Cain and Abel. Some people say that Cain as an agriculturist naturally brought the best he had, and that Abel naturally brought the best he had. Have you ever considered this point? Why should God have been pleased with the death of a lamb? What was in the divine nature which would have made the killing of a lamb a pleasure or a satisfaction? What was in that lamb slain that could possibly give pleasure to God?

When we turn to Hebrews xi. 4, we find it says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." Now faith is always the response of man to a divine revelation. When therefore it says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain," it was in response to something God had said about sacrifice; and although we are not told this in so many words, there can be no doubt that sacrifice originated with God. He was not pleased with the slaying of a lamb as such, but He used that for His own purpose, as a type and symbol of the great sacrifice to come. I maintain, therefore, that the words in Hebrews, and the thought of the beasts slain for the coats of skins, in Genesis iii., both testify to the fact that sacrifice originated with God.

What are we to say about the nature of sacrifice? In Leviticus xvii. 11 there is a verse which is the keynote of the whole Bible on this subject. "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: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." You will find in this the character of sacrifice: "The life of the flesh is in the blood." There was no virtue in the blood as such: it was the symbol of the life given over to death.

Then we notice the origin of sacrifice. Sacrifice is God's gift and the outcome of His love. We read, "I have given it," not "You gave it to me," but "I have given it to you." We have here and elsewhere the blood offered, and then the blood sprinkled. The first is the fact, the other is the factor. The one is the objective reality, the other the subjective reception. The blood must first be offered and then sprinkled. The one is the gift and the other the application.

We are told definitely in Hebrews x. 4, that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." The death of the Lord Jesus Christ was a sacrifice. He surrendered His life unto death; in that lay the efficacy of His sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Notice that the *blood* of Christ means much more than His *death*. It means both His death and His life. As we look at the New Testament we find that blood is associated with Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. In Matthew xxvi. 28, we read of the death: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." It is also associated with His resurrection. In Hebrew xiii. 20 we find: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant." It is also associated with His ascension. In Hebrews ix. 11, 12, it is said, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." And thus we have the means whereby our sins can be removed.

### III. THE POWER OF THE ATONEMENT.

That brings me to my third point—the *power* of the atonement. What does it do? First, it removes that *burden* which I have mentioned and reinstates us in our position with God. In Ephesians i. 7 and Colossians i. 14 we are told that in Christ "we have *redemption* through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." In Romans iii. 25 that we have *propitiation* through His blood. In Romans v. 9 that we have *justification* through His blood. Redemption removes the burden. Justification reinstates us in our position. We in England have what is called there the "royal clemency." A man may go to prison and be pardoned by the act of the king, who has the authority and power to exercise clemency; so that the man who is permitted to do so may go out at once from prison. But as we see him go down the road we know he was a prisoner. He broke the law of the land but has been pardoned. What the king cannot do is to reinstate the man as though he had never sinned. But what the King of England cannot do the King of kings can do.

God looks upon us not only as pardoned but as justified. Redemption brings man to God, but justification brings God to man; and in order that you and I may be saved, it is not only necessary to be brought to God—mercy could do that—but it is necessary for God to be brought to us; and only righteousness could do that.

In the second place, the blood of Jesus removes the *bondage* to which I have referred. We are often told of this slavery. In Acts xx. 28 we find: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Peter i. 19 speaks of the "precious blood of Christ." In Revelation v. 9 we read of redemption by His blood. After the slavery comes consecration. Hebrews xiii. 12 tells of sanctifying the people with His own blood—consecrated by his Blood. In Revelation xii. 11: "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." And so we have removal from bondage, and renewal of our spiritual condition.

In the third place, the blood removes the *barrier* to which I have referred, and restores us to communion. We are told in Colossians i. 20: "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross." We have in Hebrews ix. 12: "but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place"; and in Revelation i. 5: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." Revelation vii. 14: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"—all suggesting the idea of peace, and with the peace comes fellowship. Hebrews x. 19: "Having . . . boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Ephesians ii. 13: "Ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."

And so the *burden* is removed by *forgiveness*; the *bondage* is removed by *freedom*, and the *barrier* is removed by *fellowship*. The first is the means of our *position* before God; the second is the means of our *condition*, and the third is the means of our *communion*. And that is only another way of saying that in Him we have life, for as sin brings death, so Christ brings life.

Just as there is a threefold death, so there is a threefold life. As death means separation and not annihilation, so life always means union and never mere existence. There is physical life—the union.

of the soul and body ; there is spiritual life—the union of the soul with God (John xvii. 3), “ and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent ” ; and there is everlasting life—in the full sense—the union of soul and body with God for ever.

## II.

What are we to say to these things ? There are three things to which I want to call your attention by way of application.

(1) The first thing is that we are to *recognize* the fact and reality of the atonement. I have been saying much about the blood of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is clear on this point, because there is associated with it the thought of atonement. There are those who tell us we are not to think of this as part of our faith. I have with me a quotation from a book. I am sorry to mention it, because I might by so doing advertise it, and that is about the last thing I should like to do ; but because this is a Conference on Fundamentals I must do so. It is called “ A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion,” and it comes from the University of Chicago. This is the quotation in regard to the point of my address : “ To insist dogmatically as an *a priori* principle that ‘ without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins,’ is both futile and foolish in an age which has long ago abandoned the conception of bloody sacrifice and which is loudly demanding the abolition of capital punishment.” That comes from a recent book, and I want to say this : If that statement is right, the New Testament is wrong ; and if the New Testament is right, that book is not “ a guide to the Christian religion.”

I read with interest a paragraph from the “ Moslem World ” the other day. It was this : “ Is it not high time for some American theological writers and teachers to break with Germany, where the art of emptying the Gospel of its real content has been practised for half a century ? There are yet too many pro-Germans among theologians both in England and America.” Dr. Denney in his preface to the book, “ The Death of Christ,” says : “ There have been conspicuous examples of essays and even treatises on the atonement, standing in no discoverable relation to the New Testament law.” Professor Law of Toronto in his “ Tests of Life ” said : “ One may or may not accept the teaching of the New Testament,

but intellectual honesty compels us at least to recognize it as it is."

Sin is an offence against God, and I believe that common forgetfulness of this accounts for what I may call the "bloodless" religion of so many in the present day. Dr. Forsyth in his book, "The Cruciality of the Cross," says: "Blood means judgment, expiation, atonement. This is a side which it is absolutely impossible to drop from Christianity without giving the Gospel quite away."

During the last four years we have had some wonderful illustrations of the atonement in connexion with the war. Before the war people were hostile to vicarious sacrifice, and such words as "monstrous" and "absurd" were used. But during the last four years we have had some wonderful illustrations of this great principle. Of course, as you know, I am not in any sense of the word referring to the idea of men dying and thereby being saved. That is not my subject to-night, and I will only say this: So far as I can gather, the men as a body do not believe in it. You can see the absurdity of it, that our young men when they die on the battlefield immediately go to heaven, when you realize that this would be an inducement for all to go over and not come back alive. Fathers and mothers instead of praying for their boys to return would pray that they might not come back; they would pray that they might be killed and go to heaven right away.

We have in Oxford Professor Gilbert Murray who is altogether opposed to Evangelical Christianity. He says in this connexion: "As for me personally, there is one thought always with me—the thought that other men are dying for me. That is the sort of community we now are, a community in which a man dies for his brother." And so to-day we have this thought again and again brought before us, by the way in which the old, old story has been illustrated by the examples of men. One missionary stated that while in India making an address and using the illustration of England interposing on behalf of Belgium he found the illustration quite acceptable, where before the war people would not listen to the vicariousness of Christ!

Some years ago a young preacher in South Wales saw in his congregation an old minister. After the meeting was over the two were introduced and the young minister said: "I should be very grateful if you would kindly criticize my sermon, because you are a man of experience and I am only a beginner."



"Well," said the old man, "I liked your sermon; there was a great deal in it; it was well delivered; but, I did not notice any cross in it."

The young man answered, "You see, sir, it wasn't in my text."

"Well," said the old man, "I am an old man and you are a beginner; take this word from me. Whatever may be your text, be sure to make a branch line from it to the cross."

That is the glory of our Gospel. We are to recognize the fact and the force of atonement by blood.

(2) We are to *receive* it—not only to recognize it, but to receive it. In Romans iii. 25 we read: "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"; and the contrast of it is in Hebrews x. 29—those who receive on the one hand and those who reject on the other.

If there is any one here by any possibility who has never yet received this atonement, my brother or sister, why not now? I heard some time ago the story told by Dr. Vance, of Nashville, Tennessee. He was called upon to visit a Scotchman in one of the slums of the city. The man was a stranger and was very ill of consumption. He told Dr. Vance his story of back in Scotland how he came from a Christian home but ran away and played the prodigal. "And now," said Dr. Vance, "he turned to me with great hunger in his eyes, and said, 'Minister, I want you to help me to get home.'" Thinking he wanted to get back to Scotland, the Doctor asked him if he was a member of the St. Andrew's Society. The sick man said, "You do not understand me; it is my long home, I mean," and Dr. Vance then knew that he wanted him to tell him how to get saved. Dr. Vance said, "What was I to say? Was I to preach about the merits of an unselfish life? He was dying. I told him of the suffering on the cross. I tried to make him understand how on Calvary's cross Christ died that we might be saved. As I quoted the promises I saw a look of peace come into his face and heard him say that he was satisfied, and I went down the dirty stairs as though walking on air."

(3) And my last point is that we must not only recognize the truth, not only receive it, but we must *rejoice*. "Worthy the Lamb that is slain" is to be the theme of Heaven's praises. Why should we not have it here and now? Paul says, "God forbid that I

should boast, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." We know a boastful man is a contemptible specimen. There are some things in the New Testament about which we can boast, and boast without any fear of anything unworthy of us. We think of the wonderful words of Martin Luther—I never tire of referring to them—"Thou, Lord Jesus, art my righteousness. I am Thy sin. Thou hast given me what is Thine and has taken what is mine. What Thou wert not Thou didst become, that I might become what I was not."

This is what we find in 2 Corinthians v. 21: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Perish every human story,  
 Every system taught or tried,  
 God forbid that I should glory  
 Save in Jesus crucified.  
 Here let faith repose and cherish,  
 Jesus crucified for me.  
 Those who trust Him never perish,  
 They are safe beneath the tree.

Here my soul by faith would enter,  
 Pleased no more with fancy's dreams,  
 Here is love's refulgent centre,  
 Here are mercy's brightest beams.  
 Here is wisdom in perfection,  
 Here the end of fleshly strife.  
 Lord, Thou art my Resurrection,  
 Jesus, Thou my spirit's life.

Thy great love to me revealing,  
 Dwell within my worthless heart.  
 Let Thy wounding be my healing,  
 Let Thy death new life impart.  
 Lord, Thy love can ne'er be measured,  
 Nor Thy mercy half be told.  
 Thou hast more within Thee treasured  
 Than a sinner's heart can hold.

O! that I should never wander  
 From the sinner's sweetest theme.  
 O! for grace that I may ponder  
 All my steps, and walk in Him.  
 Earth is old and Time is hoary,  
 Systems to confusion slide.  
 God forbid that I should glory  
 Save in Jesus crucified.