

# THE ATONEMENT – Part I

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It is unspeakably sad that the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ—the most wonderful event that has ever happened or will happen—should have been made the occasion of contention and controversy. That it has been so, affords an awful example of human depravity. The more so, that throughout the centuries of this Christian era, some of the hottest theological battles have been waged over the vital truth of the Atonement.

Speaking generally, only two views or interpretations of the Cross have received much favor among the professed people of God: the one which affirmed that the Atonement effected to make certain the salvation of all who believe; the other which supposed that atonement was made in order to make possible the salvation of all men. The former is the strict Calvinist view; the latter, the Arminian. Even here, the difference was not merely one of terms, but of truth over against error. The one is definite and explicit; the other indefinite and intangible. The one affirms an Atonement which actually atones (i.e. fully satisfied God for those on whose behalf it was made); the other predicates an Atonement which was a sorry failure, inasmuch as the majority of those on whose behalf it was posed to be offered, perish notwithstanding. The logical and inevitable corollary of the one is a satisfied, because triumphant Savior; the other (if true) would lead, unavoidably, to a disappointed, because defeated Savior. The former interpretation was taught by such men as Wickliff, Calvin, Latimer, Tyndal, Bunyan, Owens, Dodderidge, Jonathan Edwards, Toplady, Whitefield, Spurgeon, etc. The latter by men who, as theologians, were not worthy to unloose their shoes.

Of late, a new theory has been propounded to the Christian public, a theory which approximates perilously near that of the Universalists. Erroneously based upon a few texts whose scope is confined to the people of God, the view which is now rapidly gaining favor in circles which are regarded as orthodox, is to the effect that, at the Cross, the sin question was fully and finally settled. We are told, and told by men who are looked up to by many as the champions of orthodoxy, that all the sins of all men were laid upon the crucified Christ. It is boldly affirmed that at the Cross the Lamb of God did as much for those who would not believe, as He did for those who should believe on Him. It is dogmatically announced that the only grievance which God now has against any man, is his refusal to believe in the Savior. It is said that the single issue between God and the world, is not the sin question, but the Son question.

We have said that this theory of the Atonement is a new one, and new it surely is. So far as the writer is aware, it was never propounded, at least in orthodox circles, till within the last two or three decades. It appears to be another product of this twentieth century, and like most if not all other of them, it is far inferior to what went before. Yet, strange to say,

an appeal is made to the Holy Scriptures in support of it. But in one way we are thankful for this, inasmuch as the Word of God supplies us with an infallible rule by which we may measure it. We shall, therefore, examine this strange and novel theory in the light of Holy Writ, and doing this, it will not be difficult to show how thoroughly untenable and fallacious it is.

1. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then the sin of unbelief was too. That unbelief is a sin is clear from the fact that in I John 3:23 we read "And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." Refusal to believe in Christ is, therefore, an act of flagrant disobedience, rebellion against the Most High. But if all the sins of all men were laid upon Christ (as it is now asserted), then He also endured the penalty for the Christ-rejecter's unbelief. If this be so, then Universalism is true. But it is not so. The very advocates of the view we are now refuting would not affirm it. And therein may be seen the inconsistency and untenableness of their teaching. For if unbelief is a sin and Christ did not suffer the penalty of it, then all sin was not laid upon Christ. Thus there are only two alternatives: a strictly limited Atonement, availing only for believers; or an unlimited Atonement which effectually secures the salvation of the entire human race.

2. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could He say, "The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." (Matt. 12:31) Observe that Christ here used the future tense, "shall not be." Note, too, He did not merely say to the blaspheming Jews that He was then addressing, "Shall not be forgiven unto you," but in order to take in all others who should be guilty of this sin, He said, "Shall not be forgiven unto men." It is worse than idle to raise the cavil that the sin here spoken of was peculiar and exceptional, i.e. committed only by the Jews there addressed. The fact that this solemn utterance of Christ's is found not only in Matthew, but in Mark, and also in Luke-the Gentile Gospel-disposes of it.

Without attempting to define here the precise nature of this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, it is sufficient now to point out that it is a sin quite distinct from unbelief. In scripture "blasphemy" is always an act of the lips, not merely of the mind or the will. For our present purpose, it is enough to call attention to the undeniable fact that none other than the Savior Himself here tells us there is a sin (other than unbelief) "which shall not be forgiven unto men." This being so, then it is obviously a mistake, a serious error, to say that all sin was laid on Christ and

atoned for.

3. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could He possibly say to certain ones, "Ye shall seek Me, and shall die in your sins?" (John 8:21) Christ was here addressing the Pharisees. The time was only a short while before His death. He was speaking, therefore, of that which lay on the other side of His crucifixion and resurrection. This is seen from the fact that He first said, "I go My way, and ye shall seek Me." Most evidently He was referring to His return to the Father. And He expressly declared that after His departure from this world, these men would "seek" Him (but in

vain), and they would die in their sins. Their death would be subsequent to His, and their death would be in sins. The striking thing is, that these awful words were uttered, on this same occasion, no less than three times. For in John 8:24 we read, "I said therefore unto you, That ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am, ye shall die in your sins." Note, carefully "die," not in your sin, but "in your sins." Here, then, is another indubitable proof that Christ did not bear all the sins of all men.

4. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, why did the apostle Paul (under the Holy Spirit) write, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." (Eph. 5:5, 6) The "children of disobedience" (cf. Eph. 2:2) is a name for unbelievers. It views them as rebels against God. The passage now before us tells us why "the wrath of God" shall come upon them" because of these things," looks back to what had been specified in the previous verses. God's wrath would yet descend upon them not only because of their rejection of Christ, but because they had been guilty of sins of immorality and covetousness.

It is remarkable that v. 6 begins with the words, "Let no man deceive you with vain words." It certainly looks as though the Holy Spirit was here anticipating and repudiating this modern perversion of God's truth. Men do now tell us that no wrath from God will ever fall on men because of the sins of immorality and covetousness. Men now tell us that God's wrath for all sins came upon Christ. But when men tell us such things, none other than the Holy Spirit declares that they are "vain (empty) words." They are empty words because there is no truth in them! Then let us not be deceived by them.

5. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then Stephen wasted his dying breath when he prayed, "Lay not this sin to their charge." (Acts 7:60) The sin referred to was their stoning of himself, which was murder. But perhaps Stephen was not acquainted with this modern sophistry. Certainly he did not believe it. Had He believed that all-sin had been "laid" on Christ, he would not have cried "lay not this sin to their charge," i.e., let not them suffer the penalty of it.

6. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, what did the apostle mean when he said of the Jews, who forbade him to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, "to fill up their sins always?" (1 Thess. 2:16) If language has any meaning, these words of the apostle signify that the Jews were adding sins to sins. He did not say "to fill up their sin," but, "to fill up their sins." Clearly, there was no place in his theology for this strange invention of the twentieth century.

7. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, what did the apostle mean when he said, "some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment?" (1 Tim. 5:24) One thing he meant was that no atonement had been made for them. Mark, again, he is speaking, not of sin, but "sins," and these, he declared, are "going before to judgment" Nothing could be plainer. These "sins" had not been "judged" at the Cross, therefore, they must be judged in the Day of Judgment.

8. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then why will a voice from heaven yet say to the godly Jews who shall be found in Babylon at the end time, "Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partaker of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities?" (Rev. 18:4, 5) Here is proof positive that the theory that we are now rebutting is not the theology of heaven.

Here is proof positive that the "sins" of Babylon were not laid on Christ. Here is proof positive that Christ was not "bruised" for her "iniquities", for God would not punish twice for the same sins.

9. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then God would not have dealt in judicial wrath with Israel because of the sins of their forefathers. But He did do so; and He did so after the crucifixion of His Son. No less than Christ Himself is our authority for this: "Therefore also saith the Wisdom of God, I will send them and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the, blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation." (Luke 11:49-51) This passage teaches plainly that the punishment for the accumulated sins of their forefathers was to fall upon a single generation of the Jews. Christ confirmed this by saying, "It shall be required of this generation." But if atonement was made for all sins at the Cross, then all of this would have been cancelled (remitted). That it was not so cancelled we know from the fully authenticated fact that in A.D. 70 this solemn threat was executed, and God did "require" this at the hands of the Jews then living.

10. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, then wherein lies the need for and wherein would be the propriety of the dead being "judged according to their works"? (Rev. 20:12) If the only issue between God and the world is their attitude toward Christ; if the only ground of condemnation for men be the rejection of the divinely appointed Savior, then it would be meaningless, or worse, to arraign them for their works. The fact that Holy Writ does declare that the wicked shall yet be judged "according to their works" is incontestable evidence that they will have more to answer for, and will suffer for something more than their rejection of Christ.

11. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, how could there possibly be any degrees of punishment for the lost? If the only sin which God now imputes to the wicked be their rejection of Christ, then one common guilt would rest upon all, and consequently one common punishment would be their portion. That there will be degrees of punishment among the lost is clearly established by the following scriptures: "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." (Matt. 11:22) "These shall receive greater damnation." (Mark 12:40) "And that servant, which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes." (Luke 12:47, 48) "He that despised Moses' law died without

mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" (Heb. 10:28, 29)

12. If ALL the sins of ALL men were laid upon Christ, and the only sin which God now imputes to any is the refusal to receive His Son, then it inevitably follows that all the heathen who have lived since the crucifixion and have never heard of Christ, will certainly be saved. There is no other alternative possible. Not having heard of Christ, they cannot be charged with rejecting Him, and if all their other sins were atoned for (as we are asked to believe) then, necessarily, they must stand guiltless before God. But if this were true, then John 14:6 would be untrue, for there the recorded declaration of Christ is, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."