

The Atonement

In Its Relations To

The Covenant,

The Priesthood,

The Intercession

Of Our Lord

(Volume 1)

by

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ested in—this blessed covenant or constitution; that they are aliens from the blessed kingdom of which it is the charter. It is, therefore, in its essential nature obviously a universal call. It is so because it is a call *to* the covenant. What possible contradiction or want of harmony can there be between this and the fact that the call comes from *within* the covenant,—resting, therefore, on foundations as broad, neither more nor less, as those on which the covenant itself rests? For my part, I do not see what it is that is supposed to require, or even permit of reconciliation. On the contrary, to make the Call proceed upon grounds broader than the Covenant, and on considerations not contained within it, is, in my opinion, to create a necessity for reconciling and harmonising to an extent and of a kind which it will be found in strict reason utterly impossible to meet. The Call itself is destroyed in all the intrinsic worth and in all the professed design of it, as a call *to* the Covenant, and to all its free grace and sure and saving blessings, if it be a call coming from any quarter but the Covenant itself—be it even from Christ, if it be not from Christ as the covenant-head. It is in fact simply impossible to regard it as resting on any grounds, or as based on any considerations, save those which the Covenant embraces.

These considerations have been somewhat abstract as well as miscellaneous. But we propose to resume the subject in the following chapter, treating it in a somewhat more directly scriptural manner. For we should like to

corollaries, that are all but intuitively obvious, and, as I believe, utterly indisputable.

It is only in the view of such occasionally occurring corollaries, or inferences, in refutation of error, that this book can in any sense be called controversial. Properly speaking, a controversial volume it is not. And there is not a tinge of *party* in it. Such portions of it as have appeared already in another form have met with remarkably kind acceptance from all parties. For I have attempted to set aloft, in the intelligent and adoring admiration of Christian men, the thorough efficaciousness and boundless glory of the propitiatory sacrifice of Calvary; and to do so, if possible, in such a fashion that the numerous perversions of the doctrine of the Cross may give intelligent Christian men little or no trouble.

The writing of these pages has been very pleasant work,—an opportunity for usefulness for which I am truly grateful. If it please God, I may resume my pen in further prosecution of the same exhaustless theme. Again and again I have abstained, with a sort of foud regret, from following out a tempting line of thought as I could have wished. And the investigation of the relations between Atonement and Conscience would alone afford materials for a volume as large as this. Meantime, however, I lay down my pen now, just as the great doctrine of the Atonement seems about to be discussed afresh, on the issue, Calvinism *versus* Amyraldism. May the Eternal Spirit, through whom Christ offered Himself without spot to God, direct that discussion to the triumphant vindication of the efficaciousness of the Atonement.

H. M.

tive requirement. It is, of course, therefore, a universal call, because it is a call addressed to those that are without. Is there any inconsistency between this and the fact that it calls them to come within the covenant, itself therefore coming from within, and resting on grounds not wider than those on which the covenant rests? Could it call sinners into the covenant if itself rested on grounds outside the covenant? Whatever is without the covenant, outside its limits—as an indefinite, unlimited atonement is—has nothing to do with the gospel call; can impart to it no validity, no strength, no enlargement; can constitute for it no real basis or foundation. An indefinite atonement, therefore, as pleaded for by some in the interests of the freeness of the gospel call, is one of the most self-contradictory and self-negating devices that can be imagined.

Besides, it ought to be ever borne in mind that in the giving of the gospel call the preachers of the gospel are ambassadors, and ambassadors merely. We are ministers. We give the call ministerially. He who really calls is Christ. And when Christ, by His ambassadors, and in His instituted ordinances, gives forth the gospel call, it is a glorious exercise of His kingly office. But Christ executes His kingly office by covenant. The exercise of His kingly office cannot possibly be placed on any wider, broader, more gracious foundation than the Covenant of Grace. Not any more, therefore, can the gospel call. For, as we have said, the solitary thing which it takes for granted is that sinners are not inside—not yet inter-

CHAPTER I.

ATONEMENT AND THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

If we would investigate the very doctrine of Atonement which God's Word sets forth,—avoiding arbitrary and capricious speculations, and illegitimate and useless trains of thought,—it must be laid down at the outset, as a proposition of transcendent importance,—

That the Doctrine of the Atonement ought to be discussed and defended as inside the Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace.

I. It will not be denied nor doubted that the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace is a larger category than the doctrine of the Atonement. It is wider; comprehending the Atonement within its provisions; affording to it also both explanation and support.

Now it surely is extremely injudicious and impolitic for defenders of the faith to discuss any scriptural doctrine, and particularly to profess to do so fully and exhaustively, outside of any greater category to which the doctrine properly and natively belongs. For by doing so they place it in a position of unnecessary

It is a voice from within the covenant, addressed to those that are without, with the view of bringing them within. Its administration is itself one of the stipulations of the covenant: "Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knewest not" (Isa. lv. 5). And its success is equally guaranteed by the covenant: "And nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee" (*idem*). Such is the covenant intercommunion of the Father and the Son concerning the gospel call, stipulating that it shall be given, and that when given it shall not be without success. And it is, as it were, fresh from rehearsing and recording what He hath been a witness to between the Father and the Son concerning the gospel call, that the Spirit turns to us and ministers it to us, shining fresh in the light of covenant Divine counsels concerning it;—"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near" (see vers. 6-13). It is therefore a sure source of inevitable error to overlook the relations between the call and the covenant; and, more particularly, it must most manifestly derange all scriptural and correct views, to seek for the call a basis broader than the covenant supplies. The call is a voice from within the covenant, summoning sinners to come within its gracious bonds. Of course, therefore, it is a universal call. The one thing which it takes for granted is that sinners are outside the covenant. This is all that is requisite to render them fit subjects for its gracious proposal and authorita-

danger, and assign to themselves a greater difficulty in defending it than Scripture assigns to them. They rob it of the illustration, and they rob it of the protection, which the higher category affords. They deprive it of the benefit of scriptural considerations in the light of which their defence might be comparatively easy, and would be found, indeed, presented to their hand; and, by the isolated position to which they have assigned it, they give advantages to the enemy which the abler and more acute of their number are not slow to seize. For instance: The plausible objection against a truly expiatory sacrifice, to the effect that it is unjust that the innocent should suffer that the guilty may escape, is seen to be a mere misrepresentation when the doctrine of the Covenant has been put forward as explaining and conditioning the Atonement; the objection losing all its plausibility in the light of Christ's covenant-headship and responsibility, and of the covenant oneness with Him of those whose sins He expiates by dying in their stead and room. Moreover, by this impolitic and unscientific procedure, theologians place themselves under the necessity—or at least subject themselves to the strong temptation—of betaking themselves to general and abstract reasoning to an extent that is extremely risky, and for which not the doctrine but themselves are responsible. We have no desire to exclude all abstract reasoning from the discussion of those great scriptural themes which must ever exercise all earnest minds and are found to fascinate so many.

Abstract reasoning is in many cases eminently serviceable in showing the thorough consistency of theological truth with philosophy and science truly so called. And the wise defenders of the faith will be forward to show that there is no incongruity, and indeed no want of mutual support, between theology, the Queen of Sciences, and her many handmaids in every department of solid thought and legitimate investigation. And when a great ultimate scriptural truth is set forth in its own magnificent proportions, and on its own appropriate evidence, it is one of the worthiest exercises of the human intellect to show that it conflicts with nothing that the intellect of man has discovered or trustworthily accepted. This is to assign to theology its own proper sphere, and to leave theology in its own unaided majesty.

But it is a totally different thing when a scriptural doctrine, isolated from the place which it holds in the great scheme of revelation, has been inadequately discussed—as in such a case inadequately discussed and still more inadequately defended it must inevitably be—it is a totally different thing in such a case to introduce abstract and philosophical discussion in order to supplement a deficiency which theology herself, when rightly questioned, is found to have abundant materials at hand to supply. This is not to illustrate the harmony of philosophy and theology, thereby providing some confirmation of theological truth from philosophical considerations. It is, in so far, to *turn theology into a*

are ultimately to be saved,—a covenant such as this, it is utter folly to call a covenant of grace. It is not a covenant of grace in any sense, but a covenant of judgment; and not a covenant of sovereignty, but of arbitrary and reasonless and terrific judgment. The objection, therefore, in deference to which a definite, effectual, and sure atonement is disparaged and set aside in favour of one that is indefinite and unlimited,—and from all the benefits of which, whatever these may be, an imaginary covenant interposes to exclude vast numbers of its beneficiaries,—reappears against the erroneous doctrine itself in a form the most aggravated and offensive, with relevancy which it is impossible to deny, and with a force which it is impossible to rebut.

IV. A correct application of the doctrine of the [§]Covenant is, in like manner, eminently serviceable in refuting the argument for an indefinite atonement based on the alleged necessity of providing a foundation for a universal gospel call. For—not to speak of the very obvious consideration that the command of God is sufficient warrant to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”—any intellectual difficulty that reverential minds may feel on this point should be allayed, if not indeed removed, by observing the relation in which the Gospel Call stands to the Covenant of Grace.

That relation is very intimate. The gospel call comes forth from the covenant, and summons sinners into it.

accept and apply a definite and complete atonement for the full and free and sure salvation of the lost and guilty. Sovereignty is in its true place there and then : and its action there and then may be defended against all cavils whatsoever by the answers which the Spirit of God has provided against them : “ May I not do what I will with my own ? ” “ Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God ? ” For, from that point of view, and at that stage in the order of nature, sinners are contemplated *as sinners simply*,—in the eye of Divine justice guilty and righteously exposed to the wrath of God, helpless to relieve themselves from it, and with nothing as yet achieved by Heaven for their relief. And the question, Why is not atonement provided for all ? is answered by the question, Why is atonement provided for any ? To fall back on the Divine sovereignty here is perfectly legitimate, and indeed inevitable. But to fall back on the Divine sovereignty at a *later* stage, as Dr WARDLAW’S capricious scheme of doctrine does, is utterly useless and unwarrantable. For if the sovereignty of God is called in at the later stage, at which a universal and unlimited atonement is seen, so to speak, to have already taken the field, then sinners must be viewed, not as simply sinners now, but *as sinners whose sin has been atoned for*—whatever, on this scheme, that may mean. And a covenant coming into play at such a stage, to exclude, in point of fact, vast multitudes from all beneficial effects of an atonement, which, in its own nature, had as beneficial bearings on them as on any and all of those who

philosophy—a very different matter indeed, and a course of procedure against which theologians would always do well to be upon their guard. The science of theology is perfectly competent within her own sphere for discharging all the duty which lies to her hand. She is under no necessity to confess inadequacy of materials in her own proper department for her own proper work : and when she is tempted to feel under any such necessity, it must be either because she has carried her investigations and efforts outside her own proper sphere, or has not exhausted the materials within it.

II. Remarkable instances of the truth and value of these considerations are to be met with in Dr CUNNINGHAM’S magnificent work on Historical Theology. Two in particular occur to us.

The first is his sagacious declinature to receive help in establishing the fundamental truths of Calvinism from the doctrine of what is called philosophical necessity. He wisely declines binding up the validity of a purely theological demonstration with the fate or the foundations of a philosophical theory. But the second instance is more directly in point to our present purpose, because in it we have this great theologian discarding a philosophical or metaphysical defence of divine truth, and falling back for the only real and satisfying defence of it upon the doctrine of federality. It occurs in his chapter on the Bondage of the Will. He has been considering the objection—so ready to be raised against the

doctrine of man's total inability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation—to the effect, namely, that such inability would be incompatible with responsibility. And he has subjected to a very searching and very beautifully acute investigation the distinction that has so often been relied upon in answering this objection—the distinction between natural and moral inability. Admitting this distinction as a *real* distinction, and in its own place important, he expresses himself as dissatisfied with it, as not affording any real answer to the objection, or solution of the difficulty. He says:—"I am not persuaded that any solution meets the difficulty of asserting that man is responsible for his sins and shortcomings *notwithstanding* his inability to will and to do what is good, except by showing that he is responsible *for* his inability." And to provide *this* answer—which his subtlety and sagacity and ingenuousness all combined to lead him to see and acknowledge to be fairly desiderated—he falls back on the covenant oneness of the race in Adam. "We are satisfied," he says, "that the principle which contributes more fully than any other to furnish an answer to the objection—an explanation of the difficulty—is just the scriptural doctrine which leads us to regard man in his whole history, fallen and unfallen, or the whole human race collectively in their relation to God, as *virtually one and indivisible*, so far as regards their legal standing and responsibilities, —to contemplate the whole history of the human race as virtually the history of one and the same man, or,

result. For, to bring in a covenant of grace in order to *limit* the application and circumscribe the effectual results of an atonement in its own nature and accomplished merit unlimited, is surely one of the most perverted and perverting schemes that could be adopted. To introduce a covenant of any kind as an instrument of limitation of a mercy, and of the actual blessings of a mercy, already in the field without limit, is surely too offensive to expect acceptance with thoughtful and generous minds—unless indeed very overwhelming evidence can be presented of its being verily the Divine method, clearly and unmistakably revealed to us. But to introduce a covenant of *grace*, as an instrument for the *limitation* of grace, is at once an insult to the human understanding and a travesty of the Divine wisdom. In any such view of its action and intent, it must assuredly cease to be called a covenant of grace. The grace is all in the prior arrangement or achievement, which it has been agreed on this scheme to call the Atonement; and the covenant is a covenant circumscribing the grace into limits narrower than its own. It is, therefore, a covenant, not of grace, but of alarming judgment.

Nay, more: it is a covenant of reasonless, arbitrary, and capricious judgment. For it is utterly vain to call in, in arrest of this condemnatory criticism, any reference to the sovereignty of God. The Divine sovereignty is legitimately referred to at the *earlier* stage, as arranging a real Covenant of Grace—grace true and pure and simple—taking action from the first to provide and

or indefinite atonement, undertaken literally for all men, and accomplishing as much for every human being as for any. And being a believer in the doctrines of election and of the necessity of the Spirit's regenerating grace, he held that the sovereign purpose of God comes in afterwards, in the order of nature, to determine to whom the Atonement shall be rendered actually fruitful of saving results. This, of course, is to acknowledge, in some sense, intentionally at least, a covenant of grace. But it is a covenant conditioning not Christ's work, but merely the Spirit's. Of such a covenant, however, the Scriptures contain not a single trace. The covenant which we deduce, by a large and satisfactory induction of particulars from Holy Scripture, is a covenant with Christ, concerning Christ's own work,—its nature, its objects, its beneficiaries, its rewards. And it is a covenant with the Spirit, only because it is a covenant with the *Christ*—the immeasurably Anointed One of God, anointed of the Holy Ghost, and endued with power to give the Spirit to as many as the Father hath given Him. To dislocate here, is to derange everything. To place Christ and His work outside this covenant, in order to give His redemption the aspect of larger graciousness and indefinite relations to all men universally, is to pervert the entire doctrine of the Covenant,—to turn aside, at its very fountain-head, that river the streams whereof make glad the city of God.

Moreover, under pretence of enlarging the aspects of Grace, it achieves most effectually a precisely opposite

what is substantially and practically the same thing, to regard the inability of will to anything spiritually good—which can be proved to attach to man *de facto*—as a penal infliction, a punishment justly imposed upon account of previous guilt—the guilt, of course, of Adam's first sin imputed to his posterity." "And with respect to the difficulty about responsibility, the substance of our position in answer to the objection is just this: That man is responsible for not willing and doing good, *notwithstanding* his inability to will and to do good, *because* he is answerable *for* that inability itself, having, as legally answerable for Adam's sin, inherited the inability, as part of the forfeiture penally due for that first transgression."

It is in this manner that divine truths are most convincingly established and successfully defended,—when placed, that is, in their due order and in their right relations of subordination to each other: and an illustrious instance of this, such as that which we have now given, ought not to be without its due weight with us. For instance: Let the objection to the Atonement about punishing the innocent and allowing the transgressors to escape, be referred back upon the Covenant of Grace, precisely as Dr CUNNINGHAM refers back upon the covenant of works the asserted incompatibility between inability and responsibility; and how easily is it rebutted. Bring in, that is to say, the Scriptural doctrine which teaches us to regard Christ and the Church collectively in their relation to God, *as virtually*

one and indivisible, so far as regards their legal standing and responsibilities; and the objection is not merely seen at once to be false, but to be irrelevant and inept. It requires no answer, in the light of the covenant oneness of Christ and His members: it simply disappears. We have before us "virtually the history of one and the same man,"—the Second Man, the last Adam. The death of Christ is then seen to be the real infliction of the originally threatened curse. No one considered as innocent suffers, and no one continuing guilty escapes. Righteousness and Peace are seen to kiss each other, and Justice goes before Him to set us in the way of His steps.

The objection, in this light, we have said, disappears. And that is true. But it reappears as an utterly unanswerable objection to the scheme of those who deny the doctrine of satisfaction for sin, and yet acknowledge the historical facts of Christ's sinlessness and His death on Calvary. For unless these facts are denied, or are accounted for as the theology of the Covenant of Grace accounts for them, then Christ did die precisely under the character of one in every sense and in every light innocent; and if His death was thus beneficial to sinners without being vicarious—if it issues in their good without having been suffered in their stead—then sinners, still considered as guilty, do escape by means of it. That the innocent suffer and the guilty escape thereby, is an assertion not merely without ground, but without meaning, when made against a vicarious sacrifice

such as that which is explained and safe-guarded by the Covenant of Grace. But it carries in it all its plain meaning, and rests on unanswerable grounds, when affirmed against any theory that admits that Christ was a truly righteous man, that He truly died, and by dying did not effectually expiate sin, but merely give a display of God's character, or bring into play some influence to act beneficially on the destinies and character of men. The doctrine of the Covenant, and of the covenant oneness of Christ and His people, enables us not merely to rebut but to retort the objection; and the unity of plan or principle on which the scriptural doctrine is thus both established, on the one hand, and defended, on the other, is at once very glorifying to the truth of God, and most satisfactory to the intellect of man.

III. A correct and comprehensive scheme of federal theology, in fact, commends itself very powerfully to every logical mind by the readiness with which it may be brought to bear on the exposure of the various aberrations that have manifested themselves on the doctrine of the Atonement. Take, for instance, Dr WARDLAW'S erroneous views, and place them in the light of the federal theology: they are immediately robbed of all their plausibility.

Dr WARDLAW* held the notion of a universal, unlimited,

* Discourses on the Nature and Extent of the Atonement. By Ralph Wardlaw, D.D. Glasgow, 1844.