

A Letter on Atonement

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding atonement, which is the sole ground of expiating the guilt of the believer, and it highlights the significance of the cross of Christ and the work of redemption.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 20:28, John 14:9, Romans 3:25, Ephesians 1:7, 1 Timothy 2:6, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 5:9

Topics: "Redemption", "Atonement"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of atonement in his sermon, asserting that the atonement is rooted in the cross of Christ and His sacrificial blood, which is essential for the remission of sins. He argues that rejecting the divine nature of Christ undermines the glory of His atonement and the righteousness of God. Darby highlights that the Old Testament foreshadows this truth, with sacrifices pointing to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for humanity's sins. He stresses that true redemption comes through faith in Christ's work, not through human efforts, and warns against pride, which obstructs communion with God. The sermon concludes by affirming that Christ's suffering was necessary for God's justice and grace to be fulfilled.

Transcript

Beloved Brother - In John 14. 9, the Son presents Himself as the display of the Father. Fundamental truth! which every believer receives and rejoices in. Without doubt he who rejects it denies the glory of Him who came to effect atonement, and undermines the atonement itself. It is the dignity of the person which gave divine capacity for the work, and infinite efficacy to the work when accomplished.

But atonement demanded far more than either the divine rights of the Lord, or the sinner's appropriation of Him and His work by faith apart from works. Hence reasoning from the words of the Lord, which do not touch the question, can only mislead. What does Scripture say of the atonement? Does it not make it depend on the cross of Christ? On His blood shed for the remission of our sins? On His suffering once for sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God? Here is an ample array of clear New Testament testimonies:

Rom. 3:25, Rom. 4:25, Rom. 5:9, 10;

1 Cor. 15:3;

2 Cor. 5:21;

Gal. 1:4, Gal. 3:16;

Eph. 1:7, Eph. 2:13, Eph. 4:32, Eph. 5:2;

Col. 1:14, 20;

1 Tim. 2:6;

Titus 2:14;

Heb. 1:3, Heb. 2:9, 14, Heb. 9:12, 14, 15, 24-28, Heb. 10:5-10, 12-19, Heb. 12:24, Heb. 13:12, 20;

1 Peter 1:2, 18-21, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 3:18;

1 John 1:7, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:10;

Rev. 1:5, Rev. 5:9, Rev. 7:14, etc.

Need one add the anticipatory words in the Gospels,

Matt. 20:28, Matt. 26:28;

John 1:29, or other such scriptures?

Yet it may be well to notice briefly a few indisputable types in the Old Testament. The blood of the slain lamb on the paschal night was sprinkled without, not within; on the lintel and door-posts, not for Israel to see, but for God. "When I see the blood, I will pass over." So in the sacrifices the blood was put on the horns of God's altar, presented to God, never to man. In certain cases men (lepers, priests, etc.) were sprinkled with blood that they might be cleansed, that is, judicially clean before God. Thus on the greatest of all occasions it was carried in, and put before the mercy-seat, on atonement-day; but it only the more establishes the principle, that it was for man before God, and not a mere token of God's love to man. In the New Testament application Christ is declared to have entered in by His own blood. To have come down and died in love to man is equally true, but quite distinct.

24 There is no doubt, then, of love in God more than in Christ; Scripture is explicit. The Father sent the Son; God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten. But it is equally true that the Son of Man must be lifted up; and that necessity was not merely man's evil, but God's word and righteous character and holy nature and majesty which must be vindicated in order to a righteous forgiveness. The cross of Christ meets all this, and much more. He was forsaken of God because of sin (Ps. 22.) It was no question here of the Jews or Gentiles, of Herod or Pontius Pilate, save as guilty persecutors. God too was at the cross, and made Christ sin for us, that we might become His righteousness in Christ. He had suffered for righteousness and holiness and grace before. He suffered for sins then. This is atonement, the sole ground of expiating the guilt of the believer. Nor was this a novel expectation, though a new fact. He was wounded for our transgressions, said the prince of prophets; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. Jehovah hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. "For the transgression of my people was he stricken." "It pleased Jehovah to bruise him: he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed," etc. He shall bear their iniquities. He bare the sin of many. Isa. 53.

25 Thus law, psalms, and prophets agree; Old and New Testaments alike proclaim Christ's suffering from God, and before God, because of our sins. The Lord announced it; the apostles - Paul especially - are full of it; and not least the beloved disciple, who most presses God's love which is really enhanced by it, of which the depth and strength are only there known where Christ's drinking this cup from the Father is owned. Divine love is not all the truth, nor man's hatred, nor Satan's power; but deeper than all is Christ's offering Himself to God as a sacrifice for sins. Love indeed is enfeebled incalculably by not seeing the truth that Christ bore the judgment of our sins at God's hand. Rather is love degraded into indifference to man's sins, and disregard of God's holiness and majesty, and of such warnings as are in Deut. 27:26; Rom. 2:9; Heb. 10:31. The scriptures cited prove, on the contrary, that expiation was essential for God's honour if He would save guilty man, even though he believed. Judgment was born by Christ that grace might flow out to the sinner. It is therefore now God's righteousness as well as His grace.

26 When it is argued, then, that all theology is false which makes the image of the Son different from that of the Father, is it denied that God bruised Christ, and that Christ was forsaken by God? that Christ died in expiation of our guilt before God, who raised Him from the dead? If so, this is abusing one truth to contradict another no less momentous. Justification is by faith, not works; but did Christ accomplish the work typified by the sacrifices for sin on atonement-day? Isaiah 53 predicts, and Matthew and Mark record, our Lord's suffering, as He says, by God's abandonment of Him, the bitterest of all punishment for our sins. Is God's punishing, and Christ's enduring, the same image? I should have thought them the greatest contrast; yet the counsel of peace was between Them both. What has been used, therefore, is only a misuse of John 14:9, which in truth regards Christ's person and not His work. To apply it to the cross, so as to get rid of the Lord's suffering from God for our sins, is really to explain away the Scripture truth and Christian foundation of atonement. If this be not the meaning of the argument, what is?

Further, it is assumed that righteousness in God must be the same thing as in Jesus, and that the assertion of a good quality in the Father, which the Son lacks, in effect denies that the latter is God, or like Him. But this is quite a mistake. Righteousness is, as always, consistency with the relationship in which each stands. Evidently, therefore, as among men it is modified in the servant as compared with the master, in the child with the parent, in the wife with the husband, in the subject with the sovereign, so it is with Him who, subsisting in the form of God, did not esteem it an object of rapine to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking a bondsman's form, become in the likeness of men, and found in figure as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death of the cross: wherefore also God exalted Him exceedingly. As man therefore the Son, far from lacking what is the Father's morally, has what the Father has not and could not have, as He never became incarnate. The righteousness which directs or commands is one thing, that which obeys is another. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It was His act; yet was it obedience of His Father (John 10:17, 18). The mystery of His person finds its answer in His death. To reason from one aspect of it exclusively, whether divine or human, is to divide the person, to neutralise the work, and to lose the truth. "No one knoweth the Son but the Father." We must be subject to His word, but to it all, and not to a part only. Jesus is the Son, who is not like God merely (Scripture never saying so), for He really is God, and as fully God as are the Father and the Holy Spirit.

28 Moreover all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him does dwell in Him bodily; yet, while the persons in the Godhead have not only unity of nature but one mind and counsel and purpose, so they act distinctly in manifesting it, as we see, e.g., in Matt. 3:16, 17, for they are three as well as one. And though Jesus were Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. There could not but be therefore qualities,

perfect in their kind, in Him which were not in the Father, nor in Him (the Son) till He took the place of servant as man on earth. Still more is this true of Him on the cross, where He entered on a new work, unique in its character, and infinite in its consequences of grace and glory everlasting, as the sufferings in which it was wrought. This in no way compromises the Godhead of Christ, any more than it impeaches His manifestation of the Father or expression of God. And the refusal to see distinctness of action in the Father and the Son throughout His course on earth, and, above all, in the cross, tends not indeed to Romanism, but to what is yet worse - Sabellianism, and thus far more at issue with holy Scripture than with the doctrine of Anselm, which is to me of little or no account.

We must not with the theologians confound purchase with redemption. All the world, all mankind, even the wicked, are bought by Christ's blood; but none save believers have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins though the purchase makes all to be His property or slaves; by redemption we are freed from Satan, Christ's freedmen, to serve God in liberty. Is it seriously questioned by the figure of the King dying in victory for His army, that the blood of Christ shed as a sacrifice for sin was not presented to God as well as for man? It is in vain to reason on God's loving the world, and so loving it as to send His Son to give the believer eternal life; but this is distinct from the other truth, that He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Now sacrifice in Scripture is to God, and never to the creature, which is heathenism, as the negation of sacrifice is infidelity. And assuredly the work of redemption, the forgiveness of sins, is by blood, by suffering atoningly on the cross, not by all authority in heaven and earth conferred on the Risen Man by God. And it is important to see that when all is made subject by Christ, and He hands back the kingdom, it is that not the Father but God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) should be all in all.

Yours ever in Christ,

30 Pride is the greatest of all evils that beset us, and of all our enemies it is that which dies the slowest and hardest. . . . God hates pride above all things, because it gives to man the place that belongs to Him who is above, exalted over all. Pride intercepts communion with God, and draws down His chastisement, for "God resists the proud."

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