

The Presbyterian Guardian

October 10, 1940

VOLUME 8, NO. 7

J. Gresham Machen
Editor 1936-1937

One Year—\$1.50

Published Twice Each Month—Ten Cents a Copy

Eight Months—\$1.00

EDITORIAL COUNCIL

1505 Race Street
Philadelphia, Penna.

Edwin H. Rian
Leslie W. Sloat

Ned B. Stonehouse
Murray Forst Thompson

Thomas R. Birch
Managing Editor

Mrs. Eddy's Christian Science

By the REV. LESLIE W. SLOAT

THE Bible," says Mrs. Eddy in the preface to her book, *Science and Health*, "was her only teacher." And again on page 269 of the same work (1901 edition) she declares, "I therefore plant myself unreservedly on the teachings of Jesus, of his apostles, of the Prophets, and on the testimony of the Science of Mind."

But as one turns the pages of this book—this strange book—one is inclined to question the truth of these statements. For the book does not teach, at least to the average mind, what the Bible teaches. Mrs. Eddy herself was aware of this fact, and therefore she took steps to bring the Bible into harmony with her doctrine. She did this by the simple method of inserting in her book a "Glossary"—that is, a dictionary purporting to give the meaning of Scriptural terms.

It is interesting to read her statement at the head of the glossary: "In Christian Science we learn that the substitution of the spiritual for the material definition of a Scriptural word often elucidates the meaning of the inspired writer. On this account this chapter is added. It contains the metaphysical interpretation of Bible terms, giving their spiritual sense, which is also their original meaning." However that may be, it is certain that some of the definitions Mrs. Eddy gives to particular words are not the original meanings of those words. For "Gad" does not mean "Science; spiritual being, understood; haste toward harmony," and "evening" does not mean "mistiness of mortal thought . . .," and "Gihon" does not mean "The rights of woman

acknowledged morally, civilly, and socially." And why, in a limited glossary containing only 123 definitions, is care taken to inform us that "In" is "a term obsolete in Science, if used in reference to Spirit, or Deity." As Bronson Alcott remarked, on reading *Science and Health*, "No one but a woman or a fool could have written it." Most women will consider the first suggestion an insult.

Three Doctrines

The basic teachings of Christian Science seem to be threefold. The first is that God is All. And God is good. Therefore, evil is not God and is nothing. Moreover God is Mind. There is nothing but Mind in the universe, and that mind is one, and that one mind is God. Being Mind, God has thoughts or ideas, but these are neither persons nor things, and so-called material things do not exist.

The second basic teaching of Christian Science is that since material does not exist, material evil such as sin, sickness and death cannot exist. Our sense of these things is therefore but the illusion of something that is called "mortal mind." Mortal mind has a great many other illusions, but they do not cause so much trouble as do the illusions of sin, sickness and death.

In the third place, the process by which we are to rid ourselves of the false illusions and replace them with the one truth that God is All, is by "demonstration." To demonstrate is, apparently, simply to keep in mind the thought that God is all and sickness and

The Doctrine of the Atonement

The Tenth in a Series of Radio Addresses Broadcast on the
Westminster Seminary Hour During the Fall of 1936

By the REV. J. GRESHAM MACHEN, D.D., Litt.D.

THE priestly work of Christ, or at least that part of it in which He offered Himself up as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, is commonly called the atonement, and the doctrine which sets it forth is commonly called the doctrine of the atonement. That doctrine is at the very heart of what is taught in the Word of God.

Before we present that doctrine, as we shall endeavor to do this afternoon and in a number of the talks that follow, we ought to observe that the term by which it is ordinarily designated is not altogether free from objection.

When I say that the term "atonement" is open to objection, I am not referring to the fact that it occurs only once in the King James Version of the New Testament, and is therefore, so far as New Testament usage is concerned, not a common Biblical term. A good many other terms which are rare in the Bible are nevertheless admirable terms when one comes to summarize Biblical teaching. As a matter of fact this term is rather common in the Old Testament (though it occurs only that once in the New Testament), but that fact would not be necessary to commend it if it were satisfactory in other ways. Even if it were not common in either Testament it still might be exactly the term for us to use to designate by one word what the Bible teaches in a number of words.

The real objection to it is of an entirely different kind. It is a two-fold objection. The word "atonement," in the first place, is ambiguous, and in the second place, it is not broad enough.

The one place where the word occurs in the King James Version of the New Testament is Rom. 5:11, where Paul says:

And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Here the word is used to translate a Greek word meaning "reconciliation." This usage seems to be very

close to the etymological meaning of the word, for it does seem to be true that the English word "atonement" means "at-onement." It is, therefore, according to its derivation, a natural word to designate the state of reconciliation between two parties formerly at variance.

In the Old Testament, on the other hand, where the word occurs in the King James Version not once, but forty or fifty times, it has a different meaning; it has the meaning of "propitiation." Thus we read in Lev. 1:4, regarding a man who brings a bullock to be killed as a burnt offering:

And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him (Lev. 1:4).

So also the word occurs some eight times in the King James Version in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, where the provisions of the law are set forth regarding the great day of atonement. Take, for example, the following verses in that chapter:

And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house (Lev. 16:6).

Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness (Lev. 16:15f.).

In these passages the meaning of the word is clear. God has been offended because of the sins of the people or of individuals among His

people. The priest kills the animal which is brought as a sacrifice. God is thereby propitiated, and those who have offended God are forgiven.

I am not now asking whether those Old Testament sacrifices brought forgiveness in themselves, or merely as prophecies of a greater sacrifice to come; I am not now considering the significant limitations which the Old Testament law attributes to their efficacy. We shall try to deal with those matters in some subsequent talk. All that I am here interested in is the use of the word "atonement" in the English Bible. All that I am saying is that that word in the Old Testament clearly conveys the notion of something that is done to satisfy God in order that the sins of men may be forgiven and their communion with God restored.

Somewhat akin to this Old Testament use of the word "atonement" is the use of it in our everyday parlance where religion is not at all in view. Thus we often say that someone in his youth was guilty of a grievous fault but has fully "atoned" for it or made full "atonement" for it by a long and useful life. We mean by that that the person in question has—if we may use a colloquial phrase—"made up for" his youthful indiscretion by his subsequent life of usefulness and rectitude. Mind you, I am not at all saying that a man can really "make up for" or "atone for" a youthful sin by a subsequent life of usefulness and rectitude; but I am just saying that that indicates the way in which the English word is used. In our ordinary usage the word certainly conveys the idea of something like compensation for some wrong that has been done.

It certainly conveys that notion also in those Old Testament passages. Of course that is not the only notion that it conveys in those passages. There the use of the word is very much more specific. The compensation which is indicated by the word is a compensation rendered to God, and it is a compensation that has become necessary because of an offence committed against God. Still, the notion

of compensation or satisfaction is clearly in the word. God is offended because of sin; satisfaction is made to Him in some way by the sacrifice; and so His favor is restored.

Thus in the English Bible the word "atonement" is used in two rather distinct senses. In its one occurrence in the New Testament it designates the particular means by which such reconciliation is effected—namely, the sacrifice which God is pleased to accept in order that man may again be received into favor.

Now of these two uses of the word it is unquestionably the Old Testament use which is followed when we speak of the "doctrine of the atonement." We mean by the word, when we thus use it in theology, not the reconciliation between God and man, not the "at-onement" between God and man, but specifically the means by which that reconciliation is effected—namely, the death of Christ as something that was necessary in order that sinful man might be received into communion with God.

I do not see any great objection to the use of the word in that way—provided only that we are perfectly clear that we are using it in that way. Certainly it has acquired too firm a place in Christian theology and has gathered around it too many precious associations for us to think, now, of trying to dislodge it.

However, there is another word which would in itself have been much better, and it is really a great pity that it has not come into more general use in this connection. That is the word "satisfaction." If we only had acquired the habit of saying that Christ made full satisfaction to God for man that would have conveyed a more adequate account of Christ's priestly work as our Redeemer than the word "atonement" can convey. It designates what the word "atonement"—rightly understood—designates, and it also designates something more. We shall see what that something more is in a subsequent talk.

But it is time now for us to enter definitely into our great subject. Men were estranged from God by sin; Christ as their great high priest has brought them back into communion with God. How has He done so? That is the question with which we shall be dealing in a number of the talks that now follow.

This afternoon all that I can do is

to try to state the Scripture doctrine in bare summary (or begin to state it), leaving it to subsequent talks to show how that Scripture doctrine is actually taught in the Scriptures, to defend it against objections, and to distinguish it clearly from various unscriptural theories.

What then in bare outline does the Bible teach about the "atonement"? What does it teach—to use a better term—about the satisfaction which Christ presented to God in order that sinful man might be received into God's favor?

I cannot possibly answer this question even in bare summary unless I call your attention to the Biblical doctrine of sin with which we dealt last winter. You cannot possibly understand what the Bible says about salvation unless you understand what the Bible says about the thing from which we are saved.

If then we ask what is the Biblical doctrine of sin, we observe, in the first place, that according to the Bible all men are sinners.

Well, then, that being so, it becomes important to ask what this sin is which has affected all mankind. Is it just an excusable imperfection; is it something that can be transcended as a man can transcend the immaturity of his youthful years? Or, supposing it to be more than imperfection, supposing it to be something like a definite stain, is it a stain that can easily be removed as writing is erased from a slate?

The Bible leaves us in no doubt as to the answer to these questions. Sin, it tells us, is disobedience to the law of God, and the law of God is entirely irrevocable.

Why is the law of God irrevocable? The Bible makes that plain. Because it is rooted in the nature of God. God is righteous and that is the reason why His law is righteous. Can He then revoke His law or allow it to be disregarded? Well, there is of course no external compulsion upon Him to prevent Him from doing these things. There is none who can say to Him, "What doest thou?" In that sense He can do all things. But the point is, He cannot revoke His law and still remain God. He cannot, without Himself becoming unrighteous, make His law either forbid righteousness or condone unrighteousness. When the law of God says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die," that awful penalty of death is, in-

deed, imposed by God's will; but God's will is determined by God's nature, and God's nature being unchangeably holy the penalty must run its course. God would be untrue to Himself, in other words, if sin were not punished; and that God should be untrue to Himself is the most impossible thing that can possibly be conceived.

Under that majestic law of God man was placed in the estate wherein he was created. Man was placed in a probation, which theologians call the covenant of works. If he obeyed the law during a certain limited period, his probation was to be over; he would be given eternal life without any further possibility of loss. If, on the other hand, he disobeyed the law, he would have death—physical death and eternal death in hell.

Man entered into that probation with every advantage. He was created in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. He was created not merely neutral with respect to goodness; he was created positively good. Yet he fell. He failed to make his goodness an assured and eternal goodness; he failed to progress from the goodness of innocency to the confirmed goodness which would have been the reward for standing the test. He transgressed the commandment of God, and so came under the awful curse of the law.

Under that curse came all mankind. That covenant of works had been made with the first man, Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity. He had stood, in that probation, in a representative capacity; he had stood—to use a better terminology—as the federal head of the race, having been made the federal head of the race by divine appointment. If he had successfully met the test, all mankind descended from him would have been born in a state of confirmed righteousness and blessedness, without any possibility of falling into sin or of losing eternal life. But as a matter of fact Adam did not successfully meet the test. He transgressed the commandment of God, and since he was the federal head, the divinely appointed representative of the race, all mankind sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

Thus all mankind, descended from Adam by ordinary generation, are themselves under the dreadful penalty of the law of God. They are

under that penalty at birth, before they have done anything either good or bad. Part of that penalty is the want of the righteousness with which man was created, and a dreadful corruption which is called original sin. Proceeding from that corruption when men grow to years of discretion come individual acts of transgression.

Can the penalty of sin resting upon all mankind be remitted? Plainly not, if God is to remain God. That penalty of sin was ordained in the law of God, and the law of God was no mere arbitrary and changeable arrangement but an expression of the nature of God Himself. If the penalty of sin were remitted, God would become unrighteous, and that God will not become unrighteous is the most certain thing that can possibly be conceived.

How then can sinful men be saved? In one way only. Only if a substitute is provided who shall pay for them the just penalty of God's law.

The Bible teaches that such a substitute has as a matter of fact been provided. The substitute is Jesus Christ. The law's demands of penalty must be satisfied. There is no escaping that. But Jesus Christ satisfied those demands for us when He died instead of us on the cross.

I have used the word "satisfied" advisedly. It is very important for us to observe that when Jesus died upon the cross He made a full satisfaction for our sins; He paid the penalty which the law pronounces upon our sin not in part but in full.

In saying that, there are several misunderstandings which need to be guarded against in the most careful possible way. Only by distinguishing the Scripture doctrine carefully from several distortions of it can we understand clearly what the Scripture doctrine is. I want to point out, therefore, several things that we do not mean when we say that Christ paid the penalty of our sin by dying instead of us on the cross.

In the first place, we do not mean that when Christ took our place He became Himself a sinner. Of course He did not become a sinner. Never was His glorious righteousness and goodness more wonderfully seen than when He bore the curse of God's law upon the cross. He was not deserving of that curse. Far from it! He was deserving of all praise.

What we mean, therefore, when we say that Christ bore our guilt is not that He became guilty, but that He paid the penalty that we so richly deserved.

In the second place, we do not mean that Christ's sufferings were the same as the sufferings that we should have endured if we had paid the penalty of our own sins. Obviously they were not the same. Part of the sufferings that we should have endured would have been the dreadful suffering of remorse. Christ did not endure that suffering, for He had done no wrong. Moreover, our sufferings would have endured to all eternity, whereas Christ's sufferings on the cross endured but a few hours. Plainly then His sufferings were not the same as ours would have been.

In the third place, however, an opposite error must also be warded off. If Christ's sufferings were not the same as ours, it is also quite untrue to say that He paid only a part of the penalty that was due to us because of our sin. Some theologians have fallen into that error. When man incurred the penalty of the law, they have said, God was pleased to take some other and lesser thing—namely, the sufferings of Christ on the cross—instead of exacting the full penalty. Thus, according to these theologians, the demands of the law were not really satisfied by the death of Christ,

but God was simply pleased, in arbitrary fashion, to accept something less than full satisfaction.

That is a very serious error indeed. Instead of falling into it we shall, if we are true to the Scriptures, insist that Christ on the cross paid the full and just penalty for our sin.

The error arose because of a confusion between the payment of a debt and the payment of a penalty. In the case of a debt it does not make any difference who pays; all that is essential is that the creditor shall receive what is owed him. What is essential is that just the same thing shall be paid as that which stood in the bond.

But in the case of the payment of a penalty it does make a difference who pays. The law demanded that we should suffer eternal death because of our sin. Christ paid the penalty of the law in our stead. But for Him to suffer was not the same as for us to suffer. He is God, and not merely man. Therefore if He had suffered to all eternity as we should have suffered, that would not have been to pay the just penalty of the sin, but it would have been an unjust exaction of vastly more. In other words, we must get rid of merely quantitative notions in thinking of the sufferings of Christ. What He suffered on the cross was what the law of God truly demanded not of any person but of such a person as Himself when He became our substitute in paying the penalty of sin. He did therefore make full and not merely partial satisfaction for the claims of the law against us.

Finally, it is very important to observe that the Bible's teaching about the cross of Christ does not mean that God waited for someone else to pay the penalty of sin before He would forgive the sinner. So unbelievers constantly represent it, but that representation is radically wrong. No, God Himself paid the penalty of sin—God Himself in the person of God the Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us, God Himself in the person of God the Father who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, God the Holy Spirit who applies to us the benefits of Christ's death. God's the cost and ours the marvelous gain. Who shall measure the depths of the love of God which was extended to us sinners when the Lord Jesus took our place and died in our stead upon the accursed tree?

A Word of Thanks

THE Presbyterian Guardian is grateful to its subscribers for the hundreds of renewals that have poured into the office. We trust that everyone will continue to enjoy the magazine for many months to come.

We are sorry that we cannot acknowledge each subscription personally and, because of the unusual number of orders at this time, we ask that you be patient with us if there is a slight delay in correcting the renewal date on your address label.