

Theology on the *Web.org.uk*

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine and Review

CONDUCTED BY
CLERGYMEN AND LAYMEN OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND

CONTENTS.

THE MONTH.

Paper Shortage. The National Mission. What is Proposed.
Other Communion. The Scope of the Mission. "National Sins."
Repent in Hope.

"AS OUR HOPE IS." By Bishop Ryle, D.D.

THE WAR AND THE OTHER WORLD. I. Introductory.
By the Rev. A. Plummer, D.D.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY. By the Rev. F. R.
Montgomery Hitchcock, D.D.

RICHARD HOOKER AND THE HOLY COMMUNION. By
the Rev. S. Harvey Gem.

THE ROMANCE OF THE CATECHISM. By Miss E. M. Knox.

THE ATONEMENT IN THE WRITINGS OF ST. JOHN. III.
By the Rev. T. W. Gilbert, B.D.

THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

NOTICES OF BOOKS.

"Life of Bishop John Wordsworth." "Miscellanea Evangelica."
"The Conception of the Church." "The Christian Hope in the
Apocalypse." "The Doctrine of the Atonement." "The Lord's
Prayer." "The Gospel of Healing." "Aspects of the New
Theology," and other volumes.

PUBLICATIONS OF THE MONTH.

LONDON: ROBERT SCOTT
ROXBURGHE HOUSE, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
PRICE SIXPENCE NET.

The Atonement in the Writings of St. John.

III.

THE EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

The Present Working of the Atonement.

WE have seen how the fact of the Cross of Christ is woven into the very warp and woof of the Gospel of St. John, and that the Gospel in its historical record of the fact of the Cross bears witness to its importance in the life and teaching of Christ. The Epistle of St. John adds to the importance of what has been said in the Gospel by the emphasis which it lays upon the place of the Atonement in the life of the Christian. The Epistle itself is, so to speak, an extension of the Gospel in that it seeks to apply what the Gospel has taught, and in this application we find that the Atonement takes the central place.

The general subject of the Epistle is the working of the Christian life in its threefold relationship to God, to man, and to the "world," and which starts from the Christian's fellowship with God through Christ. We shall see that the Epistle gives the Atonement the fundamental place in this fellowship.

The primary fact of the Christian life is the reality of man's communion with God, which is secured to us by Christ. This is in short the summary of the opening verses of the Epistle (i. 1-4), which tell how the historical Word of life was manifested to reveal the truth of man's fellowship with God. The verses immediately following go on to enumerate certain characteristics of those who are in fellowship with God—or in other words, trying to live the Christian life—and then declares that "the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (i. 7). The essential truth lying behind these words seems to be that a man begins the Christian life, or enters into fellowship with God, through Christ, and that through this fellowship he has a new ideal of life placed before him, an ideal which is summed up as walking in the light as God Himself is in the light (i. 6). This is admittedly an ideal, but an ideal towards which the Christian must strive, and for the strivings of our imperfect nature there is a help provided in the fact that the blood of Jesus is continually cleansing us from sin. Christ brings us into fellowship with God: sin would completely destroy that fellowship; but

the blood of Christ, or the Atonement of Christ, keeps Christians in their fellowship with God, by continually cleansing them from sin.

Having thus stated the Christian ideal, St. John has to face the facts which hinder the Christian from attaining to the ideal. It is quite clear that the ideal involved in fellowship with God can be approximated to by the continual cleansing of the blood of Christ, but St. John has to face also the fact that sin is present even in the Christian. St. John is not blind to the facts of life, as i. 8 shows, but still the ideal remains, and it remains both in the words of i. 9, that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," and also in the exhortation of ii. 1, "these things I write unto you that ye may not sin." Yet the experience of life teaches that the Christian does sin, with the inevitable result that the perfect harmony between the soul and God is broken. But where this dire result has happened, a remedy is provided, and the remedy is in the Atonement of Christ. "If any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins" (ii. 1-2). It is the Atonement which cements our broken fellowship with God.

We thus see that St. John considers the Cross the fundamental fact in the primary experience of the Christian, in that it keeps the Christian in fellowship with God by continual cleansing from sin and cements that fellowship whenever it should be broken by sin. Further examination shows that the Epistle considers the Atonement to be fundamental for the second fact of Christian experience, *i.e.* the Christian's relationship to his fellows. It will be noticed that after considering the Christian's fellowship with God, St. John goes on to consider the Christian's fellowship with man, with its corollary non-fellowship with the "world" (ii. 2-29). After treating these subjects in a general way, St. John takes them up again in chapter iii., and proceeds to emphasize them from the standpoint of the love of God, which is to be seen in the three spiritual relationships of man, *i.e.* the love of God bringing man into the position of children of God (iii. 1); the love of God in the Christian revealing itself in the Christian's relationship with his fellows, and differentiating the "children of God" from the children of the devil (iii. 10-12); and the love of God in the Christian's love of

the brethren marking the Christian off from the "world," whose characteristic is hate, and not love (iii. 13-15). Here again, however, we must come back to the Atonement to find the motive power which makes the Christian love possible, for St. John tells us plainly that it is the Atonement which reveals God's love, *i.e.*, "Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us . . ." (iii. 16). The same truth is proclaimed by St. John when dealing with these three spiritual relationships from the standpoint of the new spirit, or new life, which comes to the Christian through his fellowship with God (iii. 24, iv.). The new life does come to men through Christ (iv. 9)—that we might LIVE through Him—and the love of God was also revealed in the sending of Christ (iv. 9). But St. John goes farther than that, for when it comes to the actual fact of love, as man knows love, St. John declares that it is the Atonement which shows the working of God's love. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (iv. 10). It is the Atonement, therefore, which enables a man to understand the meaning of God's love, for a man can see the love of God in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Moreover, it is the same fact which produces the Christian's love for his fellow men. Love for man is not inherent in human nature, and if one does not go to the extent of agreeing with Hobbes that the natural man is in a continuous state of war with his fellow men, yet one can emphatically say that he is not in a state of brotherly love. The thing, however, which produces a fundamental difference in the attitude of the Christian to his fellow men is the attitude of God in the Atonement. "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (iv. 11). God's love, revealed in the Cross of Christ, is the mainspring of the Christian's love for his fellow men. The rest of the fourth chapter is an elaboration of this fact. Man's love for God has its origin in God's love for man (iv. 19), as already seen in the sending of Christ into the world to be the propitiation for man's sin (iv. 9, 10). Hence St. John's conclusion, that the Christian who has a real perception of God's love for man must inevitably show it in his own love for man. It is the Atonement which kindles in us a love for our fellow men (iv. 19-21).

The last chapter of the Epistle deals with the conclusions which St. John enumerates about the Christian life, all of which conclusions are naturally based upon the Christian's belief in Jesus Christ

(v. 1, 5, 12, cf. Gospel xx. 31). In that belief, however, St. John emphasizes the reality of the Christ in whom they believed, for their faith was attested subjectively (v. 7, 10), and not only so, but also objectively as well (v. 6-8). But the significance of the objective witness lies in the fact that the Christ to whom St. John looks is not simply He who came "by water," identifying Himself as man with the Jewish race, but He who also came "by blood," linking Himself with the whole human race by the Cross of Calvary (v. 6). It is the Cross which witnesses to the historic fact of Christ who came from God; it is the Cross which links the Epistle to the Gospel.

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

The Future Hope from the Atonement.

Having seen how important a place the Atonement occupies in the Gospel of St. John, and having also examined in the Epistle how the Atonement is the very basis of the Christian life, it now remains to consider what place the Atonement occupies in the Revelation of St. John. Since the Revelation of St. John falls within the category of apocalyptic writings, it is a portrayal of what the mystic St. John sees of the future of the world and of the future of man, but in the vision which he here unfolds we shall see that the Cross again has a prominent place and that the Atonement is primarily associated with the Christian's future hope.

The book opens with a general explanation on the part of St. John of the revelation which he had received (i. 1-3), which is then followed by a form of salutation. The salutation is again followed by an ascription of praise to Christ, but it is an ascription to the Christ of the Atonement "who loveth us and loosed us from our sins by His blood (i. 5). St. John also bids his readers look for the coming Christ, whom every eye is to see and whom one class of people in particular will see, *i.e.* those who pierced Him (i. 7). It is the Christ of the Cross which bulks so largely even in the mind of the apocalyptic writer. Moreover, when St. John enters upon the actual subject of the Revelation and tells of the command he had received to send the messages to the seven Churches, he also describes the One who gave the messages (i. 11-17), and this again is followed by the Speaker's witness to Himself, and the words are significant: "I am the first and the last and the Living

One ; and I became dead and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (i. 18). It is therefore the Christ who died and rose again (i. 18) ; the Christ who was pierced on the Cross (i. 7) ; the Christ who so loved men that He loosed them from their sins by His death on Calvary (i. 5)—this Christ it is who speaks through the apocalyptic writer and sends the messages to the seven Churches.

The messages to the Churches are completed by the end of the third chapter, and in the fourth chapter St. John is invited to look into heaven and to learn of things which are going to happen (iv. 1). St. John, therefore, gives a description of heaven, with the throne and its Occupant, the twenty-four elders round the throne, and the four living creatures who with the elders give glory to God (iv. 2-11). This description is followed by the query of the angel asking who was worthy to open the book which was in the right hand of God (v. 1-2), and St. John describes his distress because no one in heaven or earth could either open the book or look in it (v. 3-4). His distress, however, is changed, when he sees the Lamb take the book, and when the elders and the living creatures fall down in worship before the Lamb (v. 5-9). The explanation of the scene lies in the words of the hymn of praise addressed to the Lamb, *i.e.* the Lamb is One who was slain, and through His blood poured out, purchased for God men of every nation, and who thus reign upon the earth (v. 9-10). Moreover, because the Lamb had been slain for this purpose,¹ He was now worthy of all the attributes of honour and glory which were accorded to Him by every created thing in the universe (v. 11-14). Therefore it is the Atonement which, on the one hand, reveals the power of Christ the Lamb to control the book of the future, and also to win the honour and praise of men.

St. John now goes on to describe the opening of the book by the Lamb, and deals with the opening of the various seals of the book, and of the results issuing therefrom (vi. 1-17). With the opening of the sixth seal, St. John describes the cataclysm which came upon the universe (vi. 12-15), when men sought annihilation to save themselves from the wrath of Him that sat on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb (vi. 15-17). After this latter is wreaked upon men St. John pictures another scene, the first part of which is concerned with the sealing of the 144,000 of the children of Israel who are servants of God (vii. 1-8). This is followed by the wonder-

ful vision of the great multitude of people from every nation who stood before the throne giving glory and praise to God and to the Lamb (vii. 9-12). The position of the Lamb in these scenes is central with God, and incidentally bears witness to the importance of the Atonement always, but the particular point which is to be noticed more especially in this vision is contained in the remaining verses of the chapter, *i.e.* vii. 13-17. The words tell of those who have come out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb it is, therefore, who makes them fit to stand before the throne of God and to have His tabernacle spread over them (vii. 15). Nor does the influence of the Lamb stay there, for He is declared to be the One who shall lead those who have come out of great tribulation into the idyllic life where hunger and thirst and heat and sorrow shall be no more (vii. 16-17). The whole chapter tells of a perfect life in the presence of God, a life secured by the Lamb (vii. 17), whose blood brought them out of great tribulation to stand in white before "the throne" (vii. 13-14).

This description of the perfect life in the presence of God is succeeded by the narrative of the events which followed on the opening of the seventh seal of the book (viii. 1). These events are the sounding of the six trumpets and the woes which followed (viii. 1-ix. 21), the eating of the little book by St. John (x. 1-11), and the testimony of the two witnesses (xi. 3-7). Immediately afterward St. John tells of the sounding of the seventh trumpet (xi. 15), and proceeds to tell of the tumults which ensued (xi. 15-19), and the great sign of the woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and the crown of twelve stars upon her head (xii. 1). After telling what happened to this woman, who in herself symbolizes the Church of God (xii. 1-6), St. John goes on to describe the war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels. Here again the point to be kept in mind is the influence of the Lamb in this struggle, for it is definitely stated that the triumph over the dragon is due to the blood of the Lamb (xii. 11). In other words, it is the atoning sacrifice of Christ which gives such power to men that they triumph over the power of evil, both in this world and in the next. This fact is again emphasized in the following chapter, which tells of "the beast" and his warring against the saints (xiii. 1-7). The beast is declared to have author-

ity "over every tribe and people and tongue and nation" (xiii. 7), and his power is only limited when it comes to those whose names are "written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain from the foundation of the world" (xiii. 8). The Lamb it is who limits the power of the beast, and those who participate in the work of the Lamb escape from the power of the beast.

After the incident of the beast St. John proceeds to tell of the Lamb on Mount Zion, and of the 144,000 men who stood with Him (xiv. 1). The picture is again idyllic as that in chapter vii, and attempts to portray in part something of eternal life in heaven. But again the significance has to be kept in mind of the relation of the Atonement to this eternal life, for these men who sing the "new song before the throne" (xiv. 3), and who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (xiv. 4), are those who were "purchased from among men" (xiv. 4) by the work of the Lamb, and in consequence have the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on their foreheads (xiv. 1), and stand in the closest relationship to God (xiv. 1, 3). This is why St. John is able to write, in contrast to the fate of those who worship the beast (xiv. 9-12), "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth" (xiv. 13), for he sees an eternity of joy in the presence of God for those who put their trust in the Lamb.

St. John now goes on to speak of the reaping of the earth (xiv. 14-20), and of the seven last plagues (xv. 5-xvi. 21), which in themselves mark the contrast in the condition of those who are singing "the song of the Lamb" in heaven (xv. 2-4) with those on earth who have followed the beast. This again is emphasized by the fate of the scarlet woman. St. John gives the description of her in chapter xvii., with the significant note in xvii. 14, that her ten kingly satellites (xvii. 12), who wage war under the direction of the beast (xvii. 13), have no power over the Lamb nor over the followers of the Lamb (xvii. 14). This fact prepares us for the judgment on Babylon, whose destruction is portrayed in xviii. 1-24, and whose downfall presages certain great events. In the first place the fall of Babylon bears witness to the power of God (xix. 1-6), whilst it also heralds the coming "marriage of the Lamb" (xix. 7), and also the happiness of those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (xix. 9). In other words, the overthrow of the powers of evil bears witness to the power of the Lamb and of those

who believe in the Lamb (xvii. 4), and is the necessary antecedent of the communion of eternal bliss which is prepared for the Lamb and His followers (xix. 7-9).

The next series of events described are those connected with the triumph over the powers of evil and the triumph of the followers of the Lamb. The series begins with the narrative of the triumph of the King of kings over the beast and over the kings of the earth (xix. 11-21), and the chaining up of the Devil for a thousand years (xx. 1-3). This is the necessary preliminary to the millennium for those who were slain for their constancy to Christ; now with the triumph of the Lamb they are to reign with Him for a thousand years (xx. 4-6). The release of Satan after the thousand years is followed by his ultimate and complete overthrow (xx. 7-10), which also heralds the final judgment of men (xx. 11-15). But in that judgment the Lamb again stands supreme, for only those who are in the Lamb's book of life (xx. 12, 15 cf. xxi. 27) escape the lake of fire.

St. John now proceeds to tell of the new heaven and the new earth which came after the final judgment had taken place, and here one sees the centrality of the Lamb. In xxi. 10-22, St. John first of all pictures the Holy City, and describes its glories on lines which would appeal to those who were reared in Jewish tradition, but every point of importance connected with the Holy Jerusalem and its inhabitants is linked up with the Lamb. First of all it is the Lamb whose presence does away with the need for sun or moon to shine in the Holy City (xxi. 23-4), and this in itself is not remarkable, because while the kings and nations shall bring their glory into it, yet only those can enter whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (xxi. 24-7). In the Holy City, moreover, is to be found the throne of God and also of the Lamb (xxii. 3), and from the throne of God and of the Lamb there flows through the city the river of the water of life (xxii. 1). What that life means for the dwellers in the Heavenly City is summed up in two verses, *i.e.* they will serve God and worship Him (xxii. 3), they will see His face in its unveiled glory (xxii. 4), the name of God shall be on their foreheads (xxii. 4), and they shall reign in the city of God for ever (xxii. 5)—but it is a God who is never dissociated from the Lamb.

The closing verses (xxii. 6-21) then solemnly emphasize that

the vision which St. John has revealed is the record of a truth which will soon become a reality, and closes with the prayer that Christ will soon come to make the vision effectual.

This summary of the Book of the Revelation therefore serves to show how in the scheme of the future the hope of the Christian is inseparably linked up with the fact of the Atonement, and thus it makes quite clear that the Atonement is necessary for every aspect of the Christian life. The work of St. John has thus a certain completeness in its treatment of the atoning work of Christ. The Gospel shows us how the fact of the Atonement is woven into every part of our Lord's life and teaching; the Epistle reveals to us that the Atonement is the very basis and also the vital principle in the life and experience of the Christian to-day; whilst the Apocalypse declares that in the book of the future the hope of the Christian is bound up with Him who was first made known to St. John as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

T. W. GILBERT.

