

Systematic Theology 3.3.1

The Offices of Christ

Louis Berkhof

*Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ — Section 3.1: The
Offices of Christ*

Editorial note

The text has been updated to UK English; gloss boxes have been added to explain technical terms; summaries have been included; and questions for further study have been added. We have also included a master outline with the part represented in this volume shown in bold.

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Berkhof's Systematic Theology: Master Outline

This six-part guide is designed for use at the beginning of each volume. The part represented in this volume is shown in bold.

Part One: The Doctrine of God

The Being of God

The existence of God

The knowability of God

Being and attributes

The names of God

Attributes in general

Incommunicable attributes

Communicable attributes

The Holy Trinity

The Works of God

Divine decrees

Predestination

Creation in general

The spiritual world

The world

Providence

Part Two: The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

Man in His Original State

Origin of man

Constitutional nature

Image of God

Covenant of works

Man in the Covenant of Grace

Origin of sin

Character of sin

Transmission of sin

Sin in the human race

Punishment of sin

Man in the Covenant of Grace

Name and concept

Covenant of redemption

Nature of the covenant of grace

Its dual aspect

Its dispensations

Part Three: The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

The Person of Christ

History of the doctrine

Names and natures

The unipersonality of Christ

The States of Christ

Humiliation

Exaltation

The Offices of Christ

Prophetic office

Priestly office

Necessity of the atonement

Nature of the atonement

Theories of the atonement

Purpose and extent of the atonement

Intercession

Kingly office

Part Four: The Doctrine of the Application of the Work of Redemption

Soteriology

Soteriology in general

The Holy Spirit's operations

Common grace

Mystical union

External calling

Regeneration and effectual calling

Conversion

Faith

Justification

Sanctification

Perseverance of the saints

Part Five: The Doctrine of the Church and of the Means of Grace

The Church

Names and history

Nature of the Church

Government

Power

The Means of Grace

Means of grace in general

The Word

Sacraments in general

Christian baptism

The Lord's Supper

Part Six: The Doctrine of the Last Things

Individual Eschatology

Physical death

Immortality of the soul

Intermediate state

General Eschatology

Second coming of Christ

Millennial views

Resurrection of the dead

Final judgement

Final state

The Offices of Christ

I. Introduction: The Prophetic Office

Christ fulfils the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices as the Mediator. In His prophetic office He reveals the counsel and will of God concerning redemption.

A. Introductory Remarks On The Offices In General.

GLOSS Offices of Christ: Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministries, through which He reveals God, reconciles sinners, and rules His people.

1. THE IDEA OF THE OFFICES IN HISTORY. It has become customary to speak of three offices in connection with the work of Christ, namely the prophetic, the priestly, and the kingly office. While some of the early Church Fathers already speak of the different offices of Christ, Calvin was the first to

recognize the importance of distinguishing the three offices of the Mediator and to call attention to it in a separate chapter of his Institutes.[Bk. II, Chap. XV.] Among the Lutherans Gerhard was the first to develop the doctrine of the three offices, Quenstedt regarded the threefold distinction as rather unessential and called attention to the fact that some Lutheran theologians distinguished only two offices, combining the prophetic with the priestly office. Since the days of the Reformation the distinction was quite generally adopted as one of the commonplaces of theology, though there was no general agreement as to the relative importance of the offices, nor as to their interrelation. Some placed the prophetic, others the priestly, and still others the kingly, office in the foreground. There were those who applied the idea of a chronological succession to them, and thought of Christ functioning as prophet during his public ministry on earth, as priest in his final sufferings and death on the cross, and as king now that He is seated at the right hand of God. Others, however, correctly stressed the fact that He must be conceived as functioning in His threefold capacity both in His state of humiliation and in His state of exaltation. The Socinians really recognized only two offices: Christ functioned as prophet on earth, and functions as king in heaven. While they also spoke of Christ as priest, they subsumed His priestly under His kingly work, and therefore did not recognize His earthly priesthood.

In the Lutheran Church considerable opposition appeared to the doctrine of the three offices of Christ. Ernesti gives a summary of the objections that were raised. According to him the division is a purely artificial one; the terms prophet, priest, and king are not used in Scripture in the sense implied in this division; it is impossible to discriminate the one function clearly from the other in the work of Christ; and the terms as used in Scripture are applied to Christ only in a tropical sense, and therefore should not have precise meanings affixed to them, designating particular parts of the work of Christ. In answer to this it may be said that there is little force in the criticism of the use of the terms, since they are used throughout the Old Testament as designations of those who in the offices of prophet, priest, and king typified Christ. The only

really significant criticism is due to the fact that in Christ the three offices are united in one person. The result is that we cannot sharply discriminate between the different functions in the official work of Christ. The mediatorial work is always a work of the entire person; not a single work can be limited to any one of the offices. Of the later Lutheran theologians Reinhard, Doederlein, Storr and Bretschneider rejected the distinction. Ritschl also objected to it, and held that the term “vocation” should take the place of the misleading word “office.” He further regarded the kingly function or activity of Christ as primary, and the priestly and prophetic as secondary and subordinate, the former indicating man’s relation to the world, and the latter, his relation to God. He further stressed the fact that the prophetic and priestly kingship should be asserted equally of the state of humiliation and the state of exaltation. Haering follows Ritschl in his denial of the three offices, and in his emphasis on calling. Modern theology is averse to the whole idea, partly because it dislikes the terminology of the schools, and partly because it refuses to think of Christ as an official character. It is so much in love with Christ as the ideal Man, the loving Helper, and the Elder Brother, so truly human, that it fears to consider Him as a formal mediatorial functionary, since this would be apt to dehumanize Him.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCTION. The distinction of the three offices of Christ is a valuable one and ought to be retained, in spite of the fact that its consistent application to both of the states of Christ is not always easy and has not always been equally successful. The fact that Christ was anointed to a threefold office finds its explanation in the fact that man was originally intended for this threefold office and work. As created by God, he was prophet, priest, and king, and as such was endowed with knowledge and understanding, with righteousness and holiness, and with dominion over the lower creation. Sin affected the entire life of man and manifested itself not only as ignorance, blindness, error, and untruthfulness; but also as unrighteousness, guilt, and moral pollution; and in addition to that as misery, death, and destruction. Hence it was necessary that Christ, as our Mediator,

should be prophet, priest, and king. As Prophet He represents God with man; as Priest He represents man in the presence of God, and as King He exercises dominion and restores the original dominion of man. Rationalism recognizes only His prophetic office; Mysticism, only His priestly office; and Chiliasm places a one-sided emphasis on His future kingly office.

B. The Prophetic Office.

GLOSS Prophetic office: Christ's work of revealing God's saving truth and will to His people.

1. THE SCRIPTURAL IDEA OF A PROPHET.

a. The terms used in Scripture. The Old Testament uses three words to designate a prophet, namely, nabhi, ro'eh, and chozeh. The radical meaning of the word nabhi is uncertain, but it is evident from such passages as Ex. 7:1 and Deut. 18:18 that the word designates one who comes with a message from God to the people. The words ro'eh and chozeh stress the fact that the prophet is one who receives revelations from God, particularly in the form of visions. These words are used interchangeably. Other designations are "man of God", "messenger of the Lord", and "watchman". These appellatives indicate that the prophets are in the special service of the Lord, and watch for the spiritual interests of the people. In the New Testament the word prophetes is used, which is composed of pro and phemi. The preposition is not temporal in this case. Consequently, the word prophemi does not mean "to speak beforehand", but "to speak forth". The prophet is one who speaks forth from God. From these names, taken together, we gather that a prophet is one who sees things, that is, who receives revelations, who is in the service of God, particularly as a messenger, and who speaks in His name.

b. The two elements combined in the idea. The classical passages, Ex. 7:1 and Deut. 18:18 indicate that there are two elements in the prophetic function, the one passive, and the other active, the one receptive, and the other productive. The prophet receives divine revelations in dreams, visions, or verbal communications; and passes these on to the people, either orally, or visibly in prophetic actions, Num. 12:6-8; Isa. 6; Jer. 1:4-10; Ezek. 3:1-4,17. Of these two elements the passive is the most important, because it controls the active element. Without receiving, the prophet cannot give, and he cannot give more than he receives. But the active is also an integral element. One who receives a revelation is not yet necessarily a prophet. Think of Abimelech, Pharaoh, and Nebuchadnezzar, who all received revelations. What constitutes one a prophet, is the divine calling, the instruction, to communicate the divine revelation to others.

c. The duty of the prophets. It was the duty of the prophets to reveal the will of God to the people. This might be done in the form of instruction, admonition and exhortation, glorious promises, or stern rebukes. They were the ministerial monitors of the people, the interpreters of the law, especially in its moral and spiritual aspects. It was their duty to protest against mere formalism, to stress moral duty, to urge the necessity of spiritual service, and to promote the interests of truth and righteousness. If the people departed from the path of duty, they had to call them back to the law and to the testimony, and to announce the coming terror of the Lord upon the wicked. But their work was also intimately related to the promise, the gracious promises of God for the future. It was their privilege to picture the glorious things which God had in store for His people. It is also evident from Scripture that the true prophets of Israel typified the great coming prophet of the future, Deut. 18:15, cf. Acts 3:22-24, and that He was already functioning through them in the days of the Old Testament, I Pet. 1:11.

2. DISTINCTIONS APPLIED TO THE PROPHETICAL WORK OF CHRIST.

Christ functions as prophet in various ways:

a. Both before and after the incarnation. The Socinians were mistaken in limiting the prophetic work of Christ to the time of His public ministry. He was active as prophet even in the old dispensation, as in the special revelations of the angel of the Lord, in the teachings of the prophets, in whom He acted as the spirit of revelation (I Pet. 1:11), and in the spiritual illumination of believers. He appears in Proverbs 8 as wisdom personified, teaching the children of men. And after the incarnation He carries on His prophetic work in His teachings and miracles, in the preaching of the apostles and of the ministers of the Word, and also in the illumination and instruction of believers as the indwelling Spirit. He continues His prophetic activity from heaven through the operation of the Holy Spirit. His teachings are both verbal and factual, that is, He teaches not only by verbal communications, but also by the facts of revelation, such as the incarnation, His atoning death, the resurrection, and ascension; and even during the Old Testament period by types and ceremonies, by the miracles of the history of redemption, and by the providential guidance of the people of Israel.

b. Both immediately and mediately. He exercised His prophetic office immediately, as the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament period, and as the incarnate Lord by His teachings and also by His example, John 13:15; Phil. 2:5; I Pet. 2:22. And He exercised it mediately through the operation of the Holy Spirit, by means of the teachings of the Old Testament prophets, and of the New Testament apostles, and exercises it even now through the indwelling Spirit in believers, and by the agency of the ministers of the gospel. This also means that He carries on His prophetic work both objectively and externally and subjectively and internally by the Spirit, which is described as the Spirit of Christ.

3. SCRIPTURE PROOF FOR THE PROPHETIC OFFICE OF CHRIST.

Scripture testifies in more than one way to the prophetic office of Christ. He is foretold as a prophet in Deut. 18:15, a passage that is applied to Christ in Acts 3:22,23. He speaks of Himself as a prophet in Luke 13:33. Moreover, He

claims to bring a message from the Father, John 8:26-28; 12:49,50; 14:10,24; 15:15; 17:8,20, foretells future things, Matt. 24:3-35; Luke 19:41-44, and speaks with singular authority, Matt. 7:29. His mighty works served to authenticate His message. In view of all this it is no wonder that the people recognized Him as a prophet, Matt. 21:11,46; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 3:2; 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17.

4. MODERN EMPHASIS ON THE PROPHETIC OFFICE OF CHRIST. It is one of the main characteristics of the liberal school, both of the older liberalism, represented by Renan, Strauss, and Keim, and of the later liberalism, represented by such men as Pfleiderer, Weinle, Wernle, Wrede, Juelicher, Harnack, Bousset, and others, that it places the chief emphasis on Jesus as a teacher. His significance as such is emphasized to the exclusion of the other aspects of His person and work. There is a rather marked difference, however, between these two branches of liberalism. According to the older liberalism Jesus derives all His significance from His teachings, but according to the later liberalism it is the unique personality of Jesus that lends weight to His teachings. This is undoubtedly a welcome advance, but the gain is not as great as it may seem. In the words of La Touche: "Indeed, its recognition of the real significance of His personality rather than His teaching is little more than an exaltation of pedagogy by example over pedagogy by precept." Christ is after all only a great teacher. Present day Modernism is entirely under the sway of this liberal school. Even in Barthian theology there is an emphasis which might seem to bring it very much in line with modern theology. Walter Lowrie correctly says: "It is characteristic of the Barthian Theology that it thinks predominantly of the Mediator as Revealer." [Our Concern with the Theology of Crisis, p. 152.] We are told repeatedly by Barth and Brunner that the revelation is the reconciliation, and sometimes it seems as if they regard the incarnation as in itself already the reconciliation. Then again the reconciliation is represented as the revelation. In the recent Symposium on Revelation Barth says: "Jesus Christ is the revelation, because in His existence He is the reconciliation. ... The existence of Jesus Christ is the reconciliation, and therefore the bridging of the gulf that has opened here." [pp. 55 f.] The

cross is sometimes defined as the revelation of the absolute contradiction, the final conflict between this world and the other. Consequently Zerbe says that the death of Christ, according to Barth, is not exactly an atonement of the second person of the Godhead for the sin of the world, but “a message of God to man, indeed the final message; the fundamental negation; the judgment on all human possibility, especially the religious.” But while it is true that in Barthian theology the Mediator is primarily the Revealer, this does not mean that it fails to do justice to His sacrificial and atoning work.[Cf. especially Brunner, *The Mediator*, Chapters XVII-XXI.] Sydney Cave even says in his *The Doctrine of the Work of Christ*: “For Barth the cross is central in the Christian message. ‘Everything shines in the light of His death, and is illuminated by it.’”[p. 244.]

II. The Priestly Office

Christ is the true and eternal Priest who represents His people before God. He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin and continues to intercede for His own.

A. The Scriptural Idea Of A Priest.

GLOSS Priest: one appointed by God to represent people before Him, especially by offering sacrifice and interceding for sin.

1. THE TERMS USED IN SCRIPTURE. The Old Testament word for priest is almost without exception kohen. The only exceptions are found in passages which refer to idolatrous priests, II Kings 23:5; Hos. 10:5; Zeph. 1:4, where the word chemarim is found. The original meaning of kohen is uncertain. It is not impossible that in early times it could denote a civil as well as an ecclesiastical functionary, cf. I Kings 4:5; II Sam. 8:18; 20:26. It is clear that the word always

denoted someone who occupied an honorable and responsible position, and was clothed with authority over others; and that it almost without exception serves to designate an ecclesiastical officer. The New Testament word for priest is *hierous*, which originally seems to have denoted “a mighty one,” and later on “a sacred person,” “a person dedicated to God.”

2. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A PROPHET AND A PRIEST. The Bible makes a broad but important distinction between a prophet and a priest. Both receive their appointment from God, Deut. 18:18 f; Heb. 5:4. But the prophet was appointed to be God’s representative with the people, to be His messenger, and to interpret His will. He was primarily a religious teacher. The priest, on the other hand, was man’s representative with God. He had the special privilege of approach to God, and of speaking and acting in behalf of the people. It is true that the priests were also teachers during the old dispensation, but their teaching differed from that of the prophets. While the latter emphasized the moral and spiritual duties, responsibilities, and privileges, the former stressed the ritual observances involved in the proper approach to God.

3. THE FUNCTIONS OF THE PRIEST AS INDICATED IN SCRIPTURE. The classical passage in which the true characteristics of a priest are given and his work is partly designated, is Heb. 5:1. The following elements are indicated here: (a) the priest is taken from among men to be their representative; (b) he is appointed by God, cf. verse 4; (c) he is active in the interest of men in things that pertain to God, that is, in religious things; (d) his special work is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. But the work of the priest included even more than that. He also made intercession for the people (Heb. 7:25), and blessed them in the name of God, Lev. 9:22.

4. SCRIPTURAL PROOF FOR THE PRIESTLY OFFICE OF CHRIST. The Old Testament predicts and prefigures the priesthood of the coming Redeemer. There are clear references to it in Ps. 110:4 and Zech. 6:13. Moreover, the Old Testament priesthood, and particularly the high priest, clearly pre-figured a

priestly Messiah. In the New Testament there is only a single book in which He is called priest, namely, the Epistle to the Hebrews, but there the name is applied to Him repeatedly, 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1. At the same time many other New Testament books refer to the priestly work of Christ, as we shall see in the discussion of this subject.

B. The Sacrificial Work Of Christ.

GLOSS Sacrifice: a divinely appointed offering through which sin is dealt with and fellowship with God is restored.

The priestly work of Christ was twofold according to Scripture. His foremost task was to offer an all-sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the world. It belonged to the office of a priest that he should offer gifts and sacrifices for sin.

1. THE SACRIFICIAL IDEA IN SCRIPTURE. The sacrificial idea occupies a very important place in Scripture. Various theories have been suggested as to the origin and development of this idea, of which the following are the most important:

a. The gift-theory, which holds that sacrifices were originally presents to the deity, given with the intention of establishing good relations and of securing favors. This is based on an extremely low conception of God, one that is altogether out of harmony with the Scriptural representation of God. Moreover, it does not explain why the gift should always be brought in the form of a slain animal. The Bible does speak of offering gifts to God (Heb. 5:1), but only as expressions of gratitude and not for the purpose of courting the favor of God.

b. The sacramental-communion theory, based on the totemistic idea of reverencing an animal which was supposed to share in the divine nature. On solemn occasions such an animal would be slain to furnish a meal for man,

who would thus literally eat his God and assimilate the divine qualities. There is absolutely nothing in the book of Genesis, however, to suggest such an utterly unspiritual and crassly material view. It is totally at variance with the Biblical representation as a whole. This, of course, does not mean that some pagans may not have held that view later on, but it does mean that it is entirely unwarranted to regard this as the original view.

c. The homage-theory, according to which sacrifices were originally expressions of homage and dependence. Man was prompted to seek closer communion with God, not by a sense of guilt, but by a feeling of dependence and a desire to render homage to God. This theory does not do justice to the facts in the case of such early sacrifices as those of Noah and Job; nor does it explain why this homage should be rendered in the form of slaying an animal.

d. The symbol-theory, which regards the offerings as symbols of restored communion with God. The killing of the animal took place only to secure the blood, which as a symbol of life was brought upon the altar, signifying communion of life with God (Keil). This theory certainly does not square with the facts in the case of the sacrifices of Noah and Job, nor with those in the case of Abraham, when he placed Isaac upon the altar. Neither does it explain why in later days so much importance was attached to the killing of the animal.

e. The piacular theory, which regards sacrifices as being originally expiatory or atoning. On this theory the fundamental idea in the slaying of the animal was that of vicarious atonement for the sins of the offerer. In the light of Scripture this theory certainly deserves preference. The idea that, whatever other elements may have been present, such as an expression of gratitude to God, or of communion with Him, the piacular element was also present and was even the most prominent element, is favored by the following considerations: (a) The recorded effect of Noah's burnt-offerings is expiatory, Gen. 8:21. (b) The occasion for the sacrifice of Job lay in the sins of his children, Job 1:5. (c) This theory accounts for the fact that the sacrifices were

regularly brought in the form of slain animals, and that they were bloody, involving the suffering and death of the victim. (d) It is fully in harmony with the fact that the sacrifices which prevailed among heathen nations generally, were certainly regarded as expiatory. (e) It is further in perfect agreement with the undoubted presence of several promises of the coming Redeemer in the pre-Mosaic period. This should be borne in mind by those who regard the peculiar idea of sacrifices as too advanced for that time. (f) Finally, it also fits in well with the fact that, when the Mosaic sacrificial ritual was introduced, in which the expiatory element was certainly the most prominent, it was in no way represented as something entirely new.

Among those who believe that the peculiar element was present even in the pre-Mosaic sacrifices, there is a difference of opinion as to the origin of this type of sacrifices. Some are of the opinion that God instituted them by a direct divine command, while others hold that they were brought in obedience to a natural impulse of man, coupled with reflection. The Bible does not record any special statement to the effect that God commanded man to serve Him with sacrifices in those early days. And it is not impossible that man expressed His gratitude and devotion in sacrifices, even before the fall, led by the inner promptings of his own nature. But it would seem that the expiatory sacrifices after the fall could originate only in a divine appointment. There is considerable force in the arguments of Dr. A. A. Hodge. Says he: "(1) It is inconceivable that either the propriety or probable utility of presenting material gifts to the invisible God, and especially of attempting to propitiate God by the slaughter of His irrational creatures, should ever have occurred to the human mind as a spontaneous suggestion. Every instinctive sentiment and every presumption of reason must, in the first instance, have appeared to exclude them. (2) On the hypothesis that God intended to save men, it is inconceivable that He should have left them without instruction upon a question so vital as that concerned in the means whereby they might approach into His presence and conciliate His favor. (3) It is characteristic of all God's self-revelations, under every dispensation, that He discovers Himself as

jealous of any use by man of unauthorized methods of worship or service. He uniformly insists upon this very point of His sovereign right of dictating methods of worship and service, as well as terms of acceptance. (4) As a matter of fact, the very first recorded instance of acceptable worship in the family of Adam brings before us bleeding sacrifices, and seals them with the divine approbation. They appear in the first act of worship, Gen. 4:3,4. They are emphatically approved by God as soon as they appear.”[The Atonement, pp. 123 f.] The Mosaic sacrifices were clearly of divine appointment.

2. THE SACRIFICIAL WORK OF CHRIST SYMBOLIZED AND TYPIFIED.

The sacrificial work of Christ was symbolized and typified in the Mosaic sacrifices. In connection with these sacrifices the following points deserve attention.

a. Their expiatory and vicarious nature. Various interpretations have been given of the Old Testament sacrifices: (1) that they were gifts to please God, to express gratitude to Him, or to placate His wrath; (2) that they were essentially sacrificial meals symbolizing communion of man with God; (3) that they were divinely appointed means of confessing the heinousness of sin; or (4) that, in so far as they embodied the idea of substitution, they were merely symbolic expressions of the fact that God accepts the sinner, in lieu of actual obedience, in the sacrifice which expresses his desire to obey and his longing for salvation. However, Scripture testifies to the fact that all the animal sacrifices among Israel were piacular, though this feature was not equally prominent in all of them. It was most prominent in the sin- and trespass-offerings, less prominent in the burnt-offering, and least in evidence in the peace-offerings. The presence of that element in those sacrifices appears (1) from the clear statements in Lev. 1:4; 4:29,31,35; 5:10; 16:7; 17:11; (2) from the laying on of hands which, in spite of Cave’s assertion to the contrary, certainly served to symbolize the transfer of sin and guilt, Lev. 1:4; 16:21,22; (3) from the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the mercy-seat as a covering for sin, Lev. 16:27; and (4) from the repeatedly recorded effect of the sacrifices,

namely the pardoning of the sins of the offerer, Lev. 4:26,31,35. New Testament proofs could easily be added, but these will suffice.

b. Their typico-prophetical nature. The Mosaic sacrifices had not only ceremonial and symbolical, but also spiritual and typical significance. They were of a prophetic character, and represented the gospel in the law. They were designed to prefigure the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ and His atoning death. The connection between them and Christ is already indicated in the Old Testament. In Psalm 40:6-8 the Messiah is introduced as saying: "Sacrifice and offering thou hast no delight in: Mine eyes hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will O my God, yea thy law is within my heart." In these words the Messiah Himself substitutes His own great sacrifice for those of the Old Testament. The shadows pass away when the reality, which they adumbrated, arrives, Heb. 10:5-9. In the New Testament there are numerous indications of the fact that the Mosaic sacrifices were typical of the more excellent sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There are clear indications, and even express statements, to the effect that the Old Testament sacrifices prefigured Christ and His work, Col. 2:17, where the apostle clearly has the whole Mosaic system in mind; Heb. 9:23,24; 10:1; 13:11,12. Several passages teach that Christ accomplished for sinners in a higher sense what the Old Testament sacrifices were said to effect for those who brought them, and that He accomplished it in a similar way, II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; I John 1:7. He is called "the Lamb of God", John 1:29, clearly in view of Isa. 53 and of the paschal lamb, "a Lamb without blemish and without spot," I Pet. 1:19, and even "our Passover" that was slain for us, I Cor. 5:7. And because the Mosaic sacrifices were typical, they naturally shed some light on the nature of the great atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. A great many scholars under the influence of the Graf-Wellhausen school deny the penal and substitutionary character of the Old Testament sacrifices, though some of them are willing to admit that this character was sometimes ascribed to them

during the Old Testament period, though at a comparatively late date and without sufficient warrant.

c. Their purpose. In view of the preceding it may be said that the Old Testament sacrifices had a twofold purpose. As far as the theocratic, the covenant, relation was concerned, they were the appointed means whereby the offender could be restored to the outward place and privileges, enjoyed as a member of the theocracy, which he had forfeited by neglect and transgression. As such they accomplished their purpose irrespective of the temper and spirit in which they were brought. However, they were not in themselves efficacious to expiate moral transgressions. They were not the real sacrifice that could atone for moral guilt and remove moral pollution, but only shadows of the coming reality. Speaking of the tabernacle, the writer of Hebrews says: “Which is a figure for the time present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect”, Heb. 9:9. In the following chapter he points out that they could not make the offerers perfect, 10:1, and could not take away sins, 10:4. From the spiritual point of view they were typical of the vicarious sufferings and death of Christ, and obtained forgiveness and acceptance with God only as they were offered in true penitence, and with faith in God’s method of salvation. They had saving significance only in so far as they fixed the attention of the Israelite on the coming Redeemer and the promised redemption.

3. SCRIPTURAL PROOF FOR THE SACRIFICIAL WORK OF CHRIST. The striking thing in the Scriptural representations of the priestly work of Christ, is that Christ appears in them as both priest and sacrifice. This is in perfect harmony with the reality as we see it in Christ. In the Old Testament the two were necessarily separate, and in so far these types were imperfect. The priestly work of Christ is most clearly represented in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the Mediator is described as our only real, eternal, and perfect High Priest, appointed by God, who takes our place vicariously, and by His

self-sacrifice obtains a real and perfect redemption, Heb. 5:1-10; 7:1-28; 9:11-15, 24-28; 10:11-14, 19-22; 12:24, and particularly the following verses, 5:5; 7:26; 9:14. This Epistle is the only one in which Christ is called priest, but His priestly work is also clearly represented in the Epistles of Paul, Rom. 3:24,25; 5:6-8; I Cor. 5:7; 15:3; Eph. 5:2. The same representation is found in the writings of John, John 1:29; 3:14, 15; I John 2:2; 4:10. The symbol of the brazen serpent is significant. As the brazen serpent was not itself poisonous, but yet represented the embodiment of sin, so Christ, the sinless One, was made sin for us. As the lifting up of the serpent signified the removal of the plague, so the lifting up of Christ on the cross effected the removal of sin. And as a believing look at the serpent brought healing, so faith in Christ heals to the saving of the soul. The representation of Peter, I Pet. 2:24; 3:18, and of Christ Himself, Mark 10:45, corresponds with the preceding. The Lord plainly tells us that His sufferings were vicarious.

4. THE PRIESTLY WORK OF CHRIST IN MODERN THEOLOGY. As was said in the preceding chapter, the doctrine of the offices of Christ does not meet with great favor in present day theology. As a matter of fact it is generally conspicuous by its absence. It can hardly be denied that the Bible speaks of Christ as prophet, priest, and king, but it is commonly held that these terms, as applied to Christ, are only so many figurative descriptions of the different aspects of Christ's work. Christ is not regarded as a real prophet, a real priest, and a real king. And if any one of the aspects of the work of Christ is made to stand out as pre-eminent, it is the prophetic rather than the priestly aspect. The modern spirit is quite averse to the official Christ, and while it may be greatly in love with the self-denying and self-sacrificing Jesus, it absolutely refuses to recognize His official priesthood. In view of this it should be emphasized at the outset that, according to Scripture, Jesus is a real priest. As over against the priests of the Old Testament, who were merely shadows and types, He may be called the only real priest. He was revealed among men as the truth, that is, the reality of all the shadows of the Old Testament, and therefore also of the Old Testament priesthood. The seventh

chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews stresses the fact that His priesthood is vastly superior to that of Aaron. Consequently it is a sad mistake to assume that He is priest only in some figurative sense, in the sense in which devotees of literature and art are sometimes called priests. This is an entirely unwarranted use of the word “priest”, and one that is entirely foreign to Scripture. When Jehovah swore, “Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” He constituted the Messiah a real priest.

III. The Cause and Necessity of the Atonement

The atonement arises from the good pleasure, love, and justice of God. Because sin is guilt and God is holy and true, salvation requires a sufficient, vicarious satisfaction.

The great and central part of the priestly work of Christ lies in the atonement, but this, of course, is not complete without the intercession. His sacrificial work on earth calls for His service in the heavenly sanctuary. The two are complementary parts of the priestly task of the Saviour. This and the following three chapters will be devoted to a discussion of the doctrine of the atonement, which is often called “the heart of the gospel.”

A. The Moving Cause Of The Atonement.

GLOSS Atonement: Christ’s reconciling work, by which He deals with sin and secures peace between God and His people.

This lies:

1. IN THE GOOD PLEASURE OF GOD. It is sometimes represented as if the moving cause of the atonement lay in the sympathetic love of Christ for

sinner. He was so good and loving that the very idea that sinners would be hopelessly lost, was abhorrent to Him. Therefore He offered Himself as a victim in their stead, paid the penalty by laying down His life for transgressors, and thus pacified an angry God. In some cases this view prompts men to laud Christ for His supreme self-sacrifice, but at the same time, to blame God for demanding and accepting such a price. In others it simply causes men to overlook God, and to sing the praises of Christ in unqualified terms. Such a representation is certainly all wrong, and often gives the opponents of the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement occasion to say that this doctrine presupposes a schism in the trinitarian life of God. On this view Christ apparently receives His due, but God is robbed of His honour. According to Scripture the moving cause of the atonement is found in the good pleasure of God to save sinners by a substitutionary atonement. Christ Himself is the fruit of this good pleasure of God. It was predicted that He would come into the world to carry out the good pleasure of God, . . . “and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand”, Isa. 53:10. At His birth the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased”, Luke 2:14. The glorious message of John 3:16 is that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Paul says that Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father”, Gal. 1:4. And again, “For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell; and through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself”, Col. 1:19, 20. It would not be difficult to add other similar passages.

2. NOT IN THE ARBITRARY WILL OF GOD. The question may be raised, whether this good pleasure of God is to be regarded as an arbitrary will, or as a will that is rooted in the very nature of God and is in harmony with the divine perfections. It has been represented by Duns Scotus as if it were merely an arbitrary expression of the absolute sovereignty of God. But it is more in harmony with Scripture to say that the good pleasure of God to save sinners

by a substitutionary atonement was founded in the love and justice of God. It was the love of God that provided a way of escape for lost sinners, John 3:16. And it was the justice of God which required that this way should be of such a nature as to meet the demands of the law, in order that God “might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” Rom. 3:26. In Rom. 3:24,25, we find both elements combined: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” This representation guards against the idea of an arbitrary will.

3. IN LOVE AND JUSTICE COMBINED. It is necessary to avoid all one-sidedness in this respect. If we represent the atonement as founded only in the righteousness and justice of God, we fail to do justice to the love of God as a moving cause of the atonement, and afford a pretext to those enemies of the satisfaction theory of the atonement who like to represent it as implying that God is a vindictive being, who is concerned only about His own honour. If, on the other hand, we consider the atonement purely as an expression of the love of God, we fail to do justice to the righteousness and veracity of God, and we reduce the sufferings and the death of Christ to an unexplained enigma. The fact that God gave up His only begotten Son to bitter sufferings and to a shameful death cannot be explained on the principle of His love only.

B. Historical Views Respecting The Necessity Of The Atonement.

On this subject there has been considerable difference of opinion. The following positions should be distinguished:

1. THAT THE ATONEMENT WAS NOT NECESSARY. The Nominalists of the Middle Ages generally regarded it as something purely arbitrary. According to Duns Scotus it was not inherently necessary, but was determined by the arbitrary will of God. He denied the infinite value of the sufferings of

Christ, and regarded them as a mere equivalent for the satisfaction due, which God was pleased to accept as such. In his estimation God might have accepted any other substitute, and might even have carried on the work of redemption without demanding any satisfaction at all. Socinus also denied the necessity of the atonement. He removed the foundation pillar for such a necessity by the denial of such justice in God as required absolutely and inexorably that sin be punished. For him the justice of God meant only His moral equity and rectitude, by virtue of which there is no depravity or iniquity in any of His works. Hugo Grotius followed his denial on the basis of the consideration that the law of God was a positive enactment of His will, which He could relax and could also set aside altogether. The Arminians shared his views on this point. One and all denied that it was necessary for God to proceed in a judicial way in the manifestation of His grace, and maintained that He might have forgiven sin without demanding satisfaction. Schleiermacher and Ritschl, who had a dominating influence on modern theology, broke completely with the judicial conception of the atonement. As advocates of the mystical and moral influence theories of the atonement, they deny the fact of an objective atonement, and therefore by implication also its necessity. With them and with modern liberal theology in general atonement becomes merely at-one-ment or reconciliation effected by changing the moral condition of the sinner. Some speak of a moral necessity, but refuse to recognize any legal necessity.

2. THAT IT WAS RELATIVELY OR HYPOTHETICALLY NECESSARY. Some of the most prominent Church Fathers, such as Athanasius, Augustine, and Aquinas, denied the absolute necessity of the atonement and ascribed to it merely a hypothetical necessity. Thomas Aquinas thus differed from Anselm on the one hand, but also from Duns Scotus on the other hand. This is also the position taken by the Reformers. Principal Franks says that Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all avoided the Anselmian doctrine of the absolute necessity of the atonement, and ascribed to it only a relative or hypothetical necessity, based on the sovereign free will of God, or in other words, on the divine decree. This opinion is shared by Seeberg, Mosley, Stevens, Mackintosh, Bavinck, Honig,

and others. Cf. also Turretin, on The Atonement of Christ, p. 14. Calvin says: “It deeply concerned us, that He who was to be our Mediator should be very God and very man. If the necessity be inquired into, it was not what is commonly called simple or absolute, but flowed from the divine decree, on which the salvation of man depended. What was best for us our Merciful Father determined.”[Inst. II, 12.1.] The atonement was necessary, therefore, because God sovereignly determined to forgive sin on no other condition. This position naturally served to exalt the sovereign free will of God in making provision for the redemption of man. Some later theologians, such as Beza, Zanchius, and Twisse, shared this opinion, but according to Voetius the first of these changed his opinion in later life.

3. THAT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY. In the early Church Irenaeus already taught the absolute necessity of the atonement, and this was stressed by Anselm in the Middle Ages in his *Cur Deus Homo*? Reformed theology in general rightly shows a decided preference for this view. Whatever may be true of Beza in later life, it is certain that such scholars as Voetius, Mastricht, Turretin, à Marck, and Owen, all maintain the absolute necessity of the atonement and ground it particularly in the justice of God, that moral perfection by which He necessarily maintains His holiness over against sin and the sinner and inflicts due punishment on transgressors. They regard it as the only way in which God could pardon sin and at the same time satisfy His justice. This is also the position of our Confessional Standards.[Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 40; and Canons of Dort II, Art. 1.] This view is undoubtedly the most satisfying, and would seem to be most in harmony with the teachings of Scripture. The denial of it really involves a denial of the punitive justice of God as one of the inherent perfections of the divine Being, though the Reformers, of course, did not mean to deny this at all.

C. Proofs For The Necessity Of The Atonement.

GLOSS Vicarious satisfaction: the satisfaction of God's just demands by a substitute acting for sinners.

The proofs for the necessity of the atonement are mostly of an inferential character, but are nevertheless of considerable importance.

1. It would seem to be the clear teaching of Scripture that God, in virtue of His divine righteousness and holiness, cannot simply overlook defiance to His infinite majesty, but must needs visit sin with punishment. We are told repeatedly that He will by no means clear the guilty, Ex. 34:7; Num. 14:18; Nah. 1:3. He hates sin with a divine hatred; His whole being reacts against it, Ps. 5:4-6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18. Paul argues in Rom. 3:25,26, that it was necessary that Christ should be offered as an atoning sacrifice for sin, in order that God might be just while justifying the sinner. The important thing was that the justice of God should be maintained. This clearly points to the fact that the necessity of the atonement follows from the divine nature.

2. This leads right on to the second argument. The majesty and absolute immutability of the divine law as inherent in the very nature of God made it necessary for Him to demand satisfaction of the sinner. The transgression of the law inevitably carries with it a penalty. It is inviolable exactly because it is grounded in the very nature of God and is not, as Socinus would have it, a product of His free will, Matt. 5:18. The general principle of the law is expressed in these words: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not the words of this law to do them," Deut. 27:26. And if God wanted to save the sinner, in spite of the fact that the latter could not meet the demands of the law, He had to make provision for a vicarious satisfaction as a ground for the sinner's justification.

3. The necessity of the atonement also follows from the veracity of God, who is a God of truth and cannot lie. "God is not a man, that He should lie;

neither the son of man, that He should repent; hath He said it, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” Num. 23:19. “Let God be found true,” says Paul, “but every man a liar.” Rom. 3:4. When He entered into the covenant of works with man, He decreed that death would be the penalty of disobedience. That principle finds expression in many other words of Scripture, such as Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23. The veracity of God demanded that the penalty should be executed, and if sinners were to be saved, should be executed in the life of a substitute.

4. The same conclusion may be drawn from the nature of sin as guilt. If sin were merely a moral weakness, a remnant of a pre-human state, which is gradually brought into subjection to the higher nature of man, it would require no atonement. But according to Scripture sin is something far more heinous than that. Negatively, it is lawlessness, and positively, transgression of the law of God, and therefore guilt, I John 3:4; Rom. 2:25,27, and guilt makes one a debtor to the law and requires either a personal or a vicarious atonement.

5. The amazing greatness of the sacrifice which God Himself provided also implies the necessity of the atonement. God gave His only-begotten Son, to be subjected to bitter sufferings and to a shameful death. Now it is not conceivable that God would do this unnecessarily. Dr. A. A. Hodge correctly says: “This sacrifice would be most painfully irrelevant if it were anything short of absolutely necessary in relation to the end designed to be attained—that is, unless it be indeed the only possible means to the salvation of sinful man. God surely would not have made His Son a wanton sacrifice to a bare point of will.”[The Atonement, p. 237.] It is also worthy of note that Paul argues in Gal. 3:21 that Christ would not have been sacrificed, if the law could have given life. Scripture explicitly speaks of the sufferings of Christ as necessary in Luke 24:26; Heb. 2:10; 8:3; 9:22,23.

D. Objections To The Doctrine Of The Absolute Necessity Of The Atonement.

There are especially two objections that are often raised to the idea that God had to demand satisfaction, in order that He might be able to pardon sin, and because there was no other way, constituted His only begotten Son a sacrifice for the sin of the world.

1. THIS MAKES GOD INFERIOR TO MAN. Man can and often does freely forgive those who wrong him, but, according to the view under consideration, God cannot forgive until He has received satisfaction. This means that He is less good and less charitable than sinful men. But they who raise this objection fail to observe that God cannot simply be compared to a private individual, who can without injustice forget about his personal grievances. He is the Judge of all the earth, and in that capacity must maintain the law and exercise strict justice. A judge may be very kind-hearted, generous, and forgiving as a private individual, but in his official capacity he must see to it that the law takes its course. Moreover, this objection utterly ignores the fact that God was not under obligation to open up a way of redemption for disobedient and fallen man, but could with perfect justice have left man to his self-chosen doom. The ground of His determination to redeem a goodly number of the human race, and in them the race itself, can only be found in His good pleasure. The love to sinners revealed in it was not awakened by any consideration of satisfaction, but was entirely sovereign and free. The Mediator Himself was a gift of the Father's love, which naturally could not be contingent on the atonement. And, finally, it should not be forgotten that God Himself wrought the atonement. He had to make a tremendous sacrifice, the sacrifice of His only begotten and beloved Son, in order to save His enemies.

2. The objection just considered often goes hand in hand with another, namely, that this view of the absolute necessity of the atonement assumes a schism in the trinitarian life of God, and this is a rather monstrous idea. Says

David Smith, the author of *In the Days of His Flesh*: “It (the penal theory of satisfaction) places a gulf between God and Christ, representing God as the stern Judge who insisted on the execution of justice, and Christ as the pitiful Saviour who interposed and satisfied His legal demand and appeased His righteous wrath. They are not one either in their attitudes toward sinners or in the parts which they play. God is propitiated; Christ propitiates; God inflicts the punishment, Christ suffers it; God exacts the debt, Christ pays it.” [The Atonement in the Light of History and the Modern Spirit, p. 106.] This objection is also based on a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding for which those Christians are, at least in part, to blame who speak and sing as if Christ, rather than the triune God, were exclusively the author of their salvation. The Bible teaches us that the triune God provided freely for the salvation of sinners. There was nothing to constrain Him. The Father made the sacrifice of His Son, and the Son willingly offered Himself. There was no schism but the most beautiful harmony between the Father and the Son. Cf. Ps. 40:6-8; Luke 1:47-50,78; Eph. 1:3-14; 2:4-10; I Pet. 1:2.

IV. The Nature of the Atonement

Christ’s atonement is objective, vicarious, and penal. By His active and passive obedience, the Mediator satisfies God’s justice and secures redemption for His people.

The doctrine of the atonement here presented is the penal substitutionary or satisfaction doctrine, which is the doctrine clearly taught by the Word of God.

A. Statement Of The Penal Substitutionary Doctrine Of The Atonement.

GLOSS Penal substitution: Christ willingly bears the penalty due to His people’s sin, satisfying divine justice in their place.

In the discussion of this view several particulars should be stressed.

1. THE ATONEMENT IS OBJECTIVE. This means that the atonement makes its primary impression on the person to whom it is made. If a man does wrong and renders satisfaction, this satisfaction is intended to influence the person wronged and not the offending party. In the case under consideration it means that the atonement was intended to propitiate God and to reconcile Him to the sinner. This is undoubtedly the primary idea, but does not imply that we can not also speak of the sinner's being reconciled to God. Scripture does this in more than one place, Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:19,20. But it should be borne in mind that this is not equivalent to saying that the sinner is atoned, which would mean that God made amends or reparation, that He rendered satisfaction to the sinner. And even when we speak of the sinner as being reconciled, this must be understood as something that is secondary. The reconciled God justifies the sinner who accepts the reconciliation, and so operates in his heart by the Holy Spirit, that the sinner also lays aside his wicked alienation from God, and thus enters into the fruits of the perfect atonement of Christ. In other words, the fact that Christ reconciles God to the sinner results in a reflex action on the sinner, in virtue of which the sinner may be said to be reconciled to God. Since the objective atonement by Christ is an accomplished fact, and it is now the duty of the ambassadors of Christ to induce sinners to accept the atonement and to terminate their hostility to God, it is no wonder that the secondary and subjective side of the reconciliation is somewhat prominent in Scripture. This statement of the objective character of the atonement is placed in the foreground, because it represents the main difference between those who accept the satisfaction doctrine of the atonement and all those who prefer some other theory.

Now the question arises, whether this conception of the atonement is supported by Scripture. It would seem to find ample support there. The following particulars should be noted:

a. The fundamental character of the priesthood clearly points in that direction. While the prophets represented God among men, the priests in their sacrificial and intercessory work represented men in the presence of God, and therefore looked in a Godward direction. The writer of Hebrews expresses it thus: “For every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God,” 5:1. This statement contains the following elements: (1) The priest is taken from among men, is one of the human race, so as to be able to represent men; (2) he is appointed for men, that is, to be active in the interests of men; and (3) he is appointed to represent men in things pertaining to God, that is, in things that have a Godward direction, that look to God, that terminate on God. This is a clear indication of the fact that the work of the priest looks primarily to God. It does not exclude the idea that the priestly work also has a reflex influence on men.

b. The same truth is conveyed by the general idea of the sacrifices. These clearly have an objective reference. Even among the Gentiles they are brought, not to men, but to God. They were supposed to produce an effect on God. The Scriptural idea of sacrifice does not differ from this in its objective reference. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were brought to God primarily to atone for sin, but also as expressions of devotion and gratitude. Hence the blood had to be brought into the very presence of God. The writer of Hebrews says that the “things pertaining to God” consist in offering “both gifts and sacrifices for sin.” The friends of Job were urged to bring sacrifices, “lest I,” says the Lord, “deal with you after your folly.” Job 42:8. The sacrifices were to be instrumental in stilling the anger of the Lord.

c. The Hebrew word *kipper* (*piel*) expresses the idea of atonement for sin by the covering of sin or of the sinner. The blood of the sacrifice is interposed between God and the sinner, and in view of it the wrath of God is turned aside. It has the effect, therefore, of warding off the wrath of God from the sinner. In the Septuagint and in the New Testament the terms *hilaskomai* and *hilasmos* are used in a related sense. The verb means “to render propitious,”

and the noun, “an appeasing” or “the means of appeasing.” They are terms of an objective character. In classical Greek they are often construed with the accusative of theos (God), though there is no example of this in the Bible. In the New Testament they are construed with the accusative of the thing (hamartias), Heb. 2:17, or with peri and the genitive of the thing (hamartion), I John 2:2; 4:10. The first passage is best interpreted in the light of the use of the Hebrew kipper; the last can be interpreted similarly, or with theon as the object understood. There are so many passages of Scripture which speak of the wrath of God and of God as being angry with sinners, that we are perfectly justified in speaking of a propitiation of God, Rom. 1:18; Gal. 3:10; Eph. 2:3; Rom. 5:9. In Rom. 5:10 and 11:28 sinners are called “enemies of God” (echthroi) in a passive sense, indicating, not that they are hostile to God, but that they are the objects of God’s holy displeasure. In the former passage this sense is demanded by its connection with the previous verse; and in the latter by the fact that echthroi is contrasted with agapetoi, which does not mean “lovers of God,” but “beloved of God.”

d. The words katalasso and katalage signify “to reconcile” and “reconciliation.” They point to an action by which enmity is changed to friendship, and surely have, first of all, an objective signification. The offender reconciles, not himself, but the person whom he has offended. This is clearly brought out in Matt. 5:23,24: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift before the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave thy gift there before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother (which in this connection can only mean, reconcile thy brother to thyself, which is objective), and then come and offer thy gift.” The brother who had done the supposed injury is called upon to remove the grievance. He must propitiate or reconcile his brother to himself by whatsoever compensation may be required. In connection with the work of Christ the words under consideration in some instances certainly denote the effecting of a change in the judicial relation between God and the sinner by removing the judicial claim. According to II Cor. 5:19 the fact that God reconciled the world to Himself is evident from this

that He does not reckon unto them their sins. This does not point to any moral change in man, but to the fact that the demands of the law are met, and that God is satisfied. In Rom. 5:10,11 the term “reconciliation” can only be understood in an objective sense, for (1) it is said to have been effected by the death of Christ, while subjective reconciliation is the result of the work of the Spirit; (2) it was effected while we were yet enemies, that is, were still objects of God’s wrath; and (3) it is represented in verse 11 as something objective which we receive.

e. The terms *lutron* and *antilutron* are also objective terms. Christ is the Goel, the liberator, Acts 20:28; I Cor. 6:20; 7:23. He redeems sinners from the demands of God’s retributive justice. The price is paid to God by Christ as the representative of the sinner. Clearly, the Bible abundantly justifies us in ascribing an objective character to the atonement. Moreover, strictly speaking, atonement in the proper sense of the word is always objective. There is no such thing as subjective atonement. In atonement it is always the party that has done wrong that makes amends to the one who was wronged.

2. IT IS A VICARIOUS ATONEMENT.

a. The meaning of the term “vicarious atonement.” There is a difference between personal and vicarious atonement. We are interested particularly in the difference between the two in connection with the atonement of Christ. When man fell away from God, he as such owed God reparation. But he could atone for his sin only by suffering eternally the penalty affixed to transgression. This is what God might have required in strict justice, and would have required, if He had not been actuated by love and compassion for the sinner. As a matter of fact, however, God appointed a vicar in Jesus Christ to take man’s place, and this vicar atoned for sin and obtained an eternal redemption for man. Dr. Shedd calls attention to the following points of difference in this case: (1) Personal atonement is provided by the offending party; vicarious atonement by the offended party. (2) Personal atonement would have excluded the element of mercy; vicarious atonement represents

the highest form of mercy. (3) Personal atonement would have been forever in the making and hence could not result in redemption; vicarious atonement leads to reconciliation and life everlasting.

b. The possibility of vicarious atonement. All those who advocate a subjective theory of the atonement raise a formidable objection to the idea of vicarious atonement. They consider it unthinkable that a just God should transfer His wrath against moral offenders to a perfectly innocent party, and should treat the innocent judicially as if he were guilty. There is undoubtedly a real difficulty here, especially in view of the fact that this seems to be contrary to all human analogy. We cannot conclude from the possibility of the transfer of a pecuniary debt to that of the transfer of a penal debt. If some beneficent person offers to pay the pecuniary debt of another, the payment must be accepted, and the debtor is ipso facto freed from all obligation. But this is not the case when someone offers to atone vicariously for the transgression of another. To be legal, this must be expressly permitted and authorized by the lawgiver. In reference to the law this is called relaxation, and in relation to the sinner it is known as remission. The judge need not, but can permit this; yet he can permit it only under certain conditions, as (1) that the guilty party himself is not in a position to bear the penalty through to the end, so that a righteous relation results; (2) that the transfer does not encroach upon the rights and privileges of innocent third parties, nor cause them to suffer hardships and privations; (3) that the person enduring the penalty is not himself already indebted to justice, and does not owe all his services to the government; and (4) that the guilty party retains the consciousness of his guilt and of the fact that the substitute is suffering for him. In view of all this it will be understood that the transfer of penal debt is well-nigh, if not entirely, impossible among men. But in the case of Christ, which is altogether unique, because in it a situation obtained which has no parallel, all the conditions named were met. There was no injustice of any kind.

c. Scriptural proof for the vicarious atonement of Christ. The Bible certainly teaches that the sufferings and death of Christ were vicarious, and vicarious in the strict sense of the word that He took the place of sinners, and that their guilt was imputed, and their punishment transferred, to Him. This is not at all what Bushnell means, when he speaks of the “vicarious sacrifice” of Christ. For him it simply means that Christ bore our sins “on His feeling, became inserted into their bad lot by His sympathy as a friend, yielded up Himself and His life, even, to an effort of restoring mercy; in a word that He bore our sins in just the same sense as He bore our sicknesses.”[Vicarious Sacrifice, p. 46.] The sufferings of Christ were not just the sympathetic sufferings of a friend, but the substitutionary sufferings of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. The Scriptural proofs for this may be classified as follows:

(1) The Old Testament teaches us to regard the sacrifices that were brought upon the altar as vicarious. When the Israelite brought a sacrifice to the Lord, he had to lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice and confess his sin. This action symbolized the transfer of sin to the offering, and rendered it fit to atone for the sin of the offerer, Lev. 1:4. Cave and others regard this action merely as a symbol of dedication.[The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice, pp. 129 f.] But this does not explain how the laying on of hands made the sacrifice fit to make atonement for sin. Neither is it in harmony with what we are taught respecting the significance of the laying on of hands in the case of the scape-goat in Lev. 16:20-22. After the laying on of hands death was vicariously inflicted on the sacrifice. The significance of this is clearly indicated in the classical passage that is found in Lev. 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life.” Says Dr. Vos, “The sacrificial animal in its death takes the place of the death due to the offerer. It is forfeit for forfeit.” The sacrifices so brought were pre-figurations of the one great sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

(2) There are several passages in Scripture which speak of our sins as being “laid upon” Christ, and of His “bearing” sin or iniquity, Isa. 53:6,12; John 1:29; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:28; I Pet. 2:24. On the basis of Scripture we can, therefore, say that our sins are imputed to Christ. This does not mean that our sinfulness was transferred to Him — something that is in itself utterly impossible — but that the guilt of our sin was imputed to Him. Says Dr. A. A. Hodge: “Sin may be considered (1) in its formal nature as transgression of the law, I John 3:4; or (2) as a moral quality inherent in the agent (macula), Rom. 6:11-13; or (3) in respect to its legal obligation to punishment (reatus). In this last sense alone is it ever said that the sin of one is laid upon or borne by another.”[*Outlines of Theology*, p. 408.] Strictly speaking, then, the guilt of sin as liability to punishment was imputed to Christ; and this could be transferred, because it did not inhere in the person of the sinner, but was something objective.

(3) Finally, there are several passages in which the prepositions *peri*, *huper*, and *anti* are used in connection with the work of Christ for sinners. The substitutionary idea is expressed least by the first, and most by the last preposition. But even in the interpretation of *huper* and *anti* we shall have to depend largely on the context, for while the former really means “in behalf of,” it may, and in some cases does, express the idea of substitution, and while the latter may mean “instead of,” it does not always have that meaning. It is rather interesting to notice that, according to Deissmann, several instances have been found on the inscriptions of the use of *huper* with the meaning “as representative of.”[*Light From the Ancient East*, p. 153.] We find a similar use of it in Philemon 13. In such passages as Rom. 5:6-8; 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Heb. 2:9 it probably means “instead of,” though it can also be rendered “in behalf of”; but in Gal. 2:13; John 11:50, and II Cor. 5:15 it certainly means “instead of.” Robertson says that only violence to the text can get rid of that meaning here. The preposition *anti* clearly means “instead of” in Matt. 2:22; 5:38; 20:28; Mark 10:45. According to Robertson any other meaning of the term is out of the question here. The same idea is expressed in I Tim. 2:6.

d. Objections to the idea of a vicarious atonement. Several objections are raised against the idea of vicarious atonement.

(1) Substitution in penal matters is illegal. It is generally admitted that in cases of a pecuniary debt payment by a substitute is not only permissible, but must be accepted and at once cancels all further obligation on the part of the original debtor. However, it is said that penal debt is so personal that it does not admit of any such transfer. But it is quite evident that there are other than pecuniary cases in which the law has made provision for substitution. Armour in his work on Atonement and Law mentions three kinds of such cases. The first is that of substitution in cases of work for the public benefit required by law, and the second, that of substitution in the case of military service required in behalf of one's country. Respecting the third he says "Even in the case of crime, law, as understood and administered by men in all lands, provides that the penalty may be met by a substitute, in all cases in which the penalty prescribed is such that a substitute may meet it consistently with the obligations he is already under." [p. 129.] It is perfectly evident that the law does recognize the principle of substitution, though it may not be easy to cite instances in which innocent persons were permitted to act as substitutes for criminals and to bear the penalties imposed on these. This finds a sufficient explanation in the fact that it is usually impossible to find men who meet all the requirements stated under (b) above. But the fact that it is impossible to find men who meet these requirements, is no proof that Jesus Christ could not meet them. In fact, He could and did, and was therefore an acceptable substitute.

(2) The innocent is made to suffer for the wicked. It is perfectly true that, according to the penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement Christ suffered as "the righteous for the unrighteous" (I Pet. 3:18), but this can hardly be urged as an objection to the doctrine of vicarious atonement. In the form in which it is often stated it certainly has very little force. To say that this doctrine makes the innocent suffer the consequences of the guilt of the

wicked, and is therefore unacceptable, is tantamount to raising an objection against the moral government of God in general. In actual life the innocent often suffer as a result of the transgression of others. Moreover, in this form the objection would hold against all the so-called theories of the atonement, for they all represent the sufferings of Christ as being in some sense the result of the sins of mankind. Sometimes it is said that a moral agent cannot become reasonably responsible for any sin, except by doing it personally; but this is contradicted by the facts of life. One who hires another to commit a crime is held responsible; so are all accessories to a crime.

(3) God the Father is made guilty of injustice. It appears that all the objections are really variations on the same theme. The third is virtually the same as the second put in a more legal form. The doctrine of vicarious atonement, it is said, involves an injustice on the part of the Father in that He simply sacrifices the Son for the sins of mankind. This objection was already raised by Abelard, but loses sight of several pertinent facts. It was not the Father but the triune God that conceived the plan of redemption. There was a solemn agreement between the three persons in the Godhead. And in this plan the Son voluntarily undertook to bear the penalty for sin and to satisfy the demands of the divine law. And not only that, but the sacrificial work of Christ also brought immense gain and glory to Christ as Mediator. It meant for Him a numerous seed, loving worship, and a glorious kingdom. And, finally, this objection acts as a boomerang, for it returns with vengeance on the head of all those who, like Abelard, deny the necessity of an objective atonement, for they are all agreed that the Father sent the Son into the world for bitter suffering and a shameful death which, while beneficial, was yet unnecessary. This would have been cruel indeed!

4. There is no such union as would justify a vicarious atonement. It is said that, if a vicar is to remove the guilt of an offender there must be some real union between them which would justify such a procedure. It may be admitted that there must be some antecedent union between a vicar and those whom he

represents, but the idea that this must be an organic union, such as the objectors really have in mind, cannot be granted. As a matter of fact the required union should be legal rather than organic, and provision was made for such a union in the plan of redemption. In the depths of eternity the Mediator of the new covenant freely undertook to be the representative of His people, that is, of those whom the Father gave unto Him. A federal relationship was established in virtue of which He became their Surety. This is the basic and the most fundamental union between Christ and His own, and on the basis of this a mystical union was formed, ideally in the counsel of peace, to be realized in the course of history in the organic union of Christ and His Church. Therefore Christ could act as the legal representative of His own, and being mystically one with them, can also convey to them the blessings of salvation.

3. IT INCLUDES CHRIST'S ACTIVE AND PASSIVE OBEDIENCE. It is customary to distinguish between the active and passive obedience of Christ. But in discriminating between the two, it should be distinctly understood that they cannot be separated. The two accompany each other at every point in the Saviour's life. There is a constant interpenetration of the two. It was part of Christ's active obedience, that He subjected Himself voluntarily to sufferings and death. He Himself says: "No man taketh my life from me, I lay it down of myself," John 10:18. On the other hand it was also part of Christ's passive obedience, that He lived in subjection to the law. His moving about in the form of a servant constituted an important element of His sufferings. Christ's active and passive obedience should be regarded as complementary parts of an organic whole. In discussing it, account should be taken of a threefold relation in which Christ stood to the law, namely, the natural, the federal, and the penal relation. Man proved a failure in each one of these. He did not keep the law in its natural and federal aspects, and is not now in a position to pay the penalty, in order to be restored in the favor of God. While Christ naturally entered the first relation by His incarnation, He vicariously entered only the

second and third relations. And it is with these that we are particularly concerned in this connection.

a. The active obedience of Christ. Christ as Mediator entered the federal relation in which Adam stood in the state of integrity, in order to merit eternal life for the sinner. This constitutes the active obedience of Christ, consisting in all that Christ did to observe the law in its federal aspect, as the condition for obtaining eternal life. The active obedience of Christ was necessary to make His passive obedience acceptable with God, that is, to make it an object of God's good pleasure. It is only on account of it that God's estimate of the sufferings of Christ differs from His estimate of the sufferings of the lost. Moreover, if Christ had not rendered active obedience, the human nature of Christ itself would have fallen short of the just demands of God, and He would not have been able to atone for others. And, finally, if Christ had suffered only the penalty imposed on man, those who shared in the fruits of His work would have been left exactly where Adam was before he fell. Christ merits more for sinners than the forgiveness of sins. According to Gal. 4:4,5 they are through Christ set free from the law as the condition of life, are adopted to be sons of God, and as sons are also heirs of eternal life, Gal. 4:7. All this is conditioned primarily on the active obedience of Christ. Through Christ the righteousness of faith is substituted for the righteousness of the law, Rom. 10:3,4. Paul tells us that by the work of Christ "the righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us," Rom. 8:3,4; and that we are made "the righteousness of God in Him," II Cor. 5:21.

According to Anselm Christ's life of obedience had no redemptive significance, since He owed this to God for Himself. Only the sufferings of the Saviour constituted a claim on God and were basic to the sinner's redemption. Thinking along somewhat similar lines Piscator, the seventeenth century Arminians, Richard Watson, R. N. Davies, and other Arminian scholars deny that the active obedience of Christ has the redemptive significance which we ascribe to it. Their denial rests especially on two considerations: (1) Christ

needed His active obedience for Himself as man. Being under the law, He was in duty bound to keep it for Himself. In answer to this it may be said that Christ, though possessing a human nature, was yet a divine person, and as such was not subject to the law in its federal aspect, the law as the condition of life in the covenant of works. As the last Adam, however, He took the place of the first. The first Adam was by nature under the law of God, and the keeping of it as such gave him no claim to a reward. It was only when God graciously entered into a covenant with him and promised him life in the way of obedience, that the keeping of the law was made the condition of obtaining eternal life for himself and for his descendants. And when Christ voluntarily entered the federal relationship as the last Adam, the keeping of the law naturally acquired the same significance for Him and for those whom the Father had given Him. (2) God demands, or can demand, only one of two things of the sinner: either obedience to the law, or subjection to the penalty, but not both. If the law is obeyed, the penalty cannot be inflicted; and if the penalty is borne, nothing further can be demanded. There is some confusion here, however, which results in misunderstanding. This “either . . . or” applied to the case of Adam before the fall, but ceased to apply the moment he sinned and thus entered the penal relationship of the law. God continued to demand obedience of man, but in addition to that required of him that he pay the penalty for past transgression. Meeting this double requirement was the only way of life after sin entered the world. If Christ had merely obeyed the law and had not also paid the penalty, He would not have won a title to eternal life for sinners; and if He had merely paid the penalty, without meeting the original demands of the law, He would have left man in the position of Adam before the fall, still confronted with the task of obtaining eternal life in the way of obedience. By His active obedience, however, He carried His people beyond that point and gave them a claim to everlasting life.

b. The passive obedience of Christ. Christ as Mediator also entered the penal relation to the law, in order to pay the penalty in our stead. His passive obedience consisted in His paying the penalty of sin by His sufferings and

death, and thus discharging the debt of all His people. The sufferings of Christ, which have already been described, did not come upon Him accidentally, nor as the result of purely natural circumstances. They were judicially laid upon Him as our representative, and were therefore really penal sufferings. The redemptive value of these sufferings results from the following facts: They were borne by a divine person who, only in virtue of His deity, could bear the penalty through to the end and thus obtain freedom from it. In view of the infinite value of the person who undertook to pay the price and to bear the curse, they satisfied the justice of God essentially and intensively. They were strictly moral sufferings, because Christ took them upon Himself voluntarily, and was perfectly innocent and holy in bearing them. The passive obedience of Christ stands out prominently in such passages as the following: Isa. 53:6; Rom. 4:25; I Pet. 2:24; 3:18; I John 2:2, while His active obedience is taught in such passages at Matt. 3:15; 5:17,18; John 15:10; Gal. 4:4,5; Heb. 10:7-9, in connection with the passages which teach us that Christ is our righteousness, Rom. 10:4; II Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; and that He secured for us eternal life, the adoption of sons, and an eternal inheritance, Gal. 3:13,14; 4:4,5; Eph. 1:3-12; 5:25-27. Arminians are willing to admit that Christ, by His passive obedience merited for us the forgiveness of sins, but refuse to grant that He also merited for us positive acceptance with God, the adoption of children, and everlasting life.

B. Objections To The Satisfaction Or Penal Substitutionary Doctrine Of The Atonement.

GLOSS Satisfaction: the fulfilment of the righteous demands of God's law through Christ's obedient suffering and death.

There are many circles in which this doctrine of the atonement is not popular. There always has been opposition to it, and in our day the opposition is particularly strong. The main objections are the following:

1. **SUCH AN ATONEMENT WAS ENTIRELY UNNECESSARY.** Some hold that such an atonement was entirely unnecessary, either because sin is not guilt and therefore does not call for an atonement, or because there can be no obstacle to the free forgiveness of sin in God, who is our heavenly Father and is essentially a God of love. If a man can, and often does, forgive the penitent without demanding and receiving satisfaction, God, our perfect exemplar, surely can and will do this. This is the common objection of all those who advocate a purely subjective theory of the atonement. It may be answered, however, that the Bible certainly teaches us to regard sin as guilt; and because it is guilt, it makes man subject to the wrath of God and renders him liable to divine punishment. Moreover, the idea of a universal Fatherhood of God, in virtue of which He loves all men with a redemptive love, is entirely foreign to Scripture. And if God is a Father, He is also a Judge; if He is a God of love, He is also a God of justice and holiness. There is no one attribute in God which dominates and determines the expression of all the other divine perfections. And, finally, it should not be forgotten that what man can do as a private individual, he is not always able to do when acting in the capacity of a judge.

2. **SUCH AN ATONEMENT WOULD DEROGATE FROM THE CHARACTER OF GOD.** Closely connected with the preceding objection is that which holds that such an atonement would derogate from the character of God: from His justice, because He punishes the innocent for the guilty; from His love, because He acts as a stern, severe, and relentless being, who demands blood to appease His wrath; and from His pardoning grace, since He demands payment before He can or will forgive. But Christ voluntarily took the place of sinners, so that this substitution involved no injustice on the part of God. If God had been actuated by strict justice only, and not by compassionate love and mercy as well, He would have left the sinner to perish in His sin.

Moreover, it is entirely incorrect to say that, according to the satisfaction doctrine of the atonement, the love and the pardoning grace of God could not flow forth until satisfaction was rendered, because God Himself provided the ransom, and by giving His Son already gave evidence of His infinite love and pardoning grace. His love precedes even the repentance of sinners and calls this into action.

3. SUCH AN ATONEMENT ASSUMES AN IMPOSSIBLE TRANSFER OF WRATH. It is pointed out that this doctrine of the atonement holds that God transferred His wrath against the sinner to the Mediator, which is unthinkable; and that He also transferred the punishment of the sinner to Christ, which is manifestly illegal. In answer to this it may be said, however, that the wrath of God does not partake of the nature of personal vindictiveness, such as we witness among men, and which they would find it hard to transfer from the object of their hatred to a perfectly innocent person. It is God's holy displeasure against sin, a displeasure to which the sinner is also exposed as long as the guilt of sin is not removed. It is also quite natural that, when the guilt of sin as liability to punishment was transferred to Jesus Christ, the wrath of God against sin was similarly transferred. Moreover, it cannot be said that the transfer of the punishment to Christ was manifestly illegal, because, as a matter of fact, He identified Himself with His people. He made satisfaction as the responsible Head of a community for those who in union with Him constituted one legal corporate body. This responsible union was constituted, says Hodge, (a) by His own voluntary assumption of the legal responsibilities of His people, (b) by the recognition of His sponsorship by God, and (c) by His assumption of our nature.

4. SUCH AN ATONEMENT IS NOT TAUGHT IN THE GOSPELS. Some are of the opinion that the Bible teaches no vicarious atonement or, if the Bible does, the Gospels certainly do not. And after all, it is what Jesus taught, and not what Paul said, that counts. We need not enter upon a lengthy discussion of this matter, since we have already shown that there is abundant proof for a

vicarious atonement in Scripture. It is true that it does not stand out so clearly in the teachings of the Gospels as in those of the Epistles, but this is due to the fact (to express it in the words of Crawford) “that the purpose of our Lord’s personal ministry in His life and death were not so much the full preaching of the atonement, as the full accomplishment of the atonement in order to the preaching of it.”[The Atonement, p. 385.] Yet even the Gospels contain sufficient evidence for it, Matt. 20:28; John 1:29; 3:16; 10:11; 15:13; Matt. 26:27; John 6:51.

5. SUCH A DOCTRINE IS IMMORAL AND INJURIOUS. It is also claimed that this view of the atonement is immoral and injurious in its practical tendency. It is said to undermine the authority of the moral law, and to weaken, if not destroy, the force of our obligations and inducements to personal holiness. This objection was already made to the doctrine of free grace in the days of Paul. The charge is not true, however, for this theory more than any other upholds the majesty of the law, and in no way minimizes the obligation of the redeemed sinner to render full obedience to the law. On the contrary, it offers several incentives to personal holiness, by emphasizing the exceeding sinfulness of sin, by displaying the unspeakable love of God and of Jesus Christ, and by the assurance of divine aid in the struggle of life, and of the acceptance of our imperfect services in Christ.