

The Atonement

You wish to understand more about Christ's death being an atonement. I shall try and explain...

The curse which Adam by his sins brought upon us all was this, "Thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). This included the death of the body, the death of the soul, and the eternal destruction of both in hell. This is the curse which hangs over every unpardoned sinner. And our sins have only added certainty and weight to the awful curse, for "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Now when the Son of God said He would become our Surety and Saviour, the Father said, "Thou must die for them"; see John 10:17,18: "I lay down my life... This commandment I have received from my Father." It is true, Christ did not suffer eternal destruction in hell; but He was a person so glorious and excellent – God's own Son – that His short sufferings were equal in value to our eternal agonies. So that in the eye of law, and in God's account, Jesus has suffered all that you and I were condemned to suffer. Hence that sweet, sweet passage,

"Comfort ye, comfort ye,...for she (the Church) hath received (in Christ) of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1,2). Christ's dying for us is as much in God's account as if we had twice over borne the eternal agonies of hell. Hence that sweet song which God has enabled you to sing: "I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me" (Isaiah 12:1). Hence also that triumphant question, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died" (Romans 8:34).

Keep looking then to Jesus, dear soul, and you will have the peace that passeth understanding. Whenever Satan accuses you, send him to the stripes of the Lord Jesus...You have found the pearl of great price. Go and sin no more. God is able to keep you from falling. In His dear arms I leave you.

An extract from a letter written to an inquiring believer, 5th November, 1842, by Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-43), the Minister of St. Peter's, Dundee.