ATONEMENT, PEACE, ACCESS.

BY THE EDITOR.

ROM. 4: 25; 5: 1-2: "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

In no instance is the division of the Scriptures into chapters more unfortunate than here. The last verse of chapter four and the first verses of chapter five are clearly connected parts of one statement. In the one chapter the fountain of grace is laid resting on the two strong pillars the death and resurrection of Christ; in the other the superstructure rises with successive tiers of faith, peace, access and hope, and "The Therefore," brings the two parts into connection. Consider then first:

Our Reconciliation to God "Who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification."

What is called the doctrine of substitution could not be more strongly affirmed than in these words. Christ did not die as a spectacle of human endurance, but as a sacrifice for human sin. And when one says that it violates our sense of justice that the innocent should suffer for the guilty, we reply that it depends on the single question whether that suffering is voluntary or compulsory. If the law should lay hold of me and force me to pay a debt of my neighbor for which I was in no sense beholden, I should have a right to denounce the injustice of the proceeding; but were I of my own free will to assume a debt of my neighbor out of compassion for the poverty and distress of his family every one, I am sure, would consider that to be in the highest degree praiseworthy, and just. The will is everything here—a free-will or a constrained will, that is the only question. The dollar wrung from your hand against your consent is robbery; the dollar won from your hand by the argument which persuades your will is charity. God did not force his Son to die for the sins of the world. To have done so would have been a monstrous injustice at which Michael and all the angels might have had reason to revolt. Christ suffered for our sins out of pity and not from compulsion, and it is this fact which sets a crown of glory over his cross where there had otherwise been only a culmination of injustice.

But you may ask whether it does not seem unjust for God to accept the blood of the innocent as a ransom for the guilty even though blood is voluntarily shed. But think a moment that it is the law, and not the lawgiver to whom that offering is made. I do not say that the law is greater than God, so that he cannot change it if he would; but I do say that it is so sacred and so righteous that he will not change it. Now the law says "the soul that sinneth it shall die." There may be worlds whose mathematics are so reversed that there five and five make two, and whose physics are so inverted that fire freezes instead of warming, and there may be worlds where spiritual laws are so revised that "the wages of sin is life eternal." But I do not believe that any one of these conditions is true in all God's universe. As long as fire burns so long does sin destroy the soul. Christ put himself under this eternal law. To the law that demanded suffering for sin he gave suffering; to the law that pronounced a curse upon the wrong-doer he became a curse; to the law whose penalty for sin was death he gave death—"He was delivered for our offences"—Whatever those offences deserved he rendered. His sacrifice in a word was just as righteous as it was voluntary. Therefore who of us has any right to object? On the contrary is not here a wondrous exhibition of grace? And what I want to impress on you this morning is that the forgiveness which we get through Christ violates no law but conforms to a law. You know that this is the proble
set before us in Scripture. "How can God be just and yet justify the ungodly?" That is, how can justice be made to do the very opposite thing from that which it essays to do, viz., forgive instead of punish? Hard problem! Yet behold yonder mariner! All the gates of heaven are against him, but he can so adjust his sails that the winds blowing northward can carry him southward, and instead of any law of nature being violated, law is obeyed.

Therefore observe the peculiar phraseology of my text. "Who was delivered on account of our offences and raised again on account of our justification," are the words exactly rendered? Christ actually had accomplished our justification after the three days in the tomb. We sometimes sing how Christ "burst the gates of death and tore the bars away," I am sure he did no such thing. He was no jail-breaker getting out of prison by force of his omnipotent strength. If he had been he might legally have been re-arrested and remanded once more to the custody of the tomb. He served out to the last day and hour and minute his sentence in the grave; and then he came forth from the tomb because as Peter declares it was "not possible that he should be holden of it." Not possible since now the time of his detention was complete. He was raised again on account of our justification, i.e., because our justification had been accomplished. The law of God in other words had been satisfied, no requirement slighted, no penalty omitted. As Arnold Von Winkleried bared his bosom and gathered a whole sheaf of the enemies' spears into his heart, thus saving his little band by his sacrifice, so Christ gathered into his heart all the pains and penalties of a world's sin; the quiver of a broken law had been emptied of its arrows, and when he rose from the dead justification had been accomplished for all the world, and there remained no more condemnation for those who should believe.

Our Peace with God.—"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God." Salvation is always in the present tense in the New Testament, "We have peace with God." This is because it is the acceptance of a divine fact, not the experience of a human feeling. If God offers me peace as an accomplished reality I have it the moment I accept it by faith; if, on the contrary, it is something which I am required to work out from the depths of my own experience it may be a long time before I can have it, so that instead of being in the present tense it must be put into the future tense and the subjunctive mood. Here is the immense advantage of the gospel over the law. The law, standing in human observances, could never give rest of conscience to the worshiper because he could never be sure that he had perfectly kept its requirements. The gospel on the contrary is the revelation of the fact that Christ has perfectly obeyed the law for us, and that we may rest in his obedience by faith. It is the heavenwide difference between "do" and "done." In the first instance, the Decalogue comes to us saying, "My commandments I give unto you, keep them and you shall have peace;" in the second Christ comes to us saying, "My peace I give unto you, accept it and you shall keep my commandments." The Lord's Prayer was spoken to those who were still under the law. And have you noticed how its doctrine of forgiveness is exactly the reverse of that which is taught as under grace. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us" says the law. "Forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" says grace. Eph. 4: 32. The order is exactly inverted, you see. In the first instance God's forgiveness is conditioned on ours; in the second, our forgiveness is conditioned on God's. I can never get peace under the first condition, for I can never be sure that I perfectly forgive my brother, and therefore I can never be sure that God perfectly forgives me. But when I am
assured of God's forgiveness I have rest of conscience. Now I can forgive because I am forgiven, instead of praying to be forgiven because I forgive. It is building the human on the divine, not the divine on the human. It is fearlessly measuring by God's standard, instead of fearfully inviting God to measure by man's standard. Now the whole question of the soul's peace turns on this point. The ritualist and the moralist regard it as the highest presumption for one to say that he knows that he is saved. Why? Because their religion rests on "doing" not on "done." And human doing never reaches the condition of done. These are problems in mathematics and in physics, which have been propounded to tax the human mind, but which confessedly can never be solved. The problem of squaring the circle is such an one; the discovery of perpetual motion another. But every approach to their solution has at last been baffled, every hope of success been finally blasted. No student or mechanic has yet been able to enter into the rest of assured success in working out these problems. But God has solved these problems. Behold the sun drawing up mist from the ocean, and then pouring it down in rain upon the mountain top to keep the rivers running on increasingly. Evaporation and flow! Here is perpetual motion. Let the mechanic searching and racking his brain over the unsolvable problem, now dip his water wheel into the swift flowing river and set all his machinery going. And let the sinner toiling in vain to solve the question "How shall man be just to God?" cease his striving. For it is written "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified." God has solved this problem also. Jesus Christ is "made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." He has squared the circle of infinite perfection, filling out to its utmost boundary the demands of a holy law. His righteousness you may make your own; his obedience you may claim for yourself. Accept it and rest in it and be at peace. For thus it is written: "To him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness." It is not the man that toils over the problem of perpetual motion for days and years, who carries on the great manufactories at Lowell and Manchester; but the man who believes in God's perpetual motion and lays hold of it by his water wheel. And it is not the man who strains over the hopeless problem of perfectly keeping the law of God who does the great work for Christ and himself; but the man who by faith unites himself to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Our Access to God.—"By whom also we have access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand." The same faith which saves us introduces us into the presence of God. This brings us a step further in the progress of our thought. Note how strikingly, how dramatically, if I may say so, all this is told in the closing scene of our Saviour's life.

It was about the third hour after mid-day when Jesus cried "It is finished." From that moment salvation by the "done" of Christ took the place of salvation by the "doing" of man. Resting in the "It is finished" of Christ we have peace in our souls.

But while this was said on the cross be hold what was happening in the temple. The heavy veil which hung before the Holy of Holies was suddenly rent from top to bottom. Thus by a significant miracle it has proclaimed that unhindered access to God had now been effected. Let us consider deeply then the significance of this saying, "By whom we have access by faith." Forgiveness is one thing; fellowship is quite another. If one has done you a great wrong, you may freely pardon his offence, and at the same time prefer not to admit him to intimate fellowship with yourself and family. This is more than likely to be the case. Sin is not only an offence but a barrier, it not only smites the heart, but it
also shuts the heart. You find it exceedingly difficult to admit one who has done you wrong into your full unrestrained affectation. But not so in grace. Being justified by faith we have entrance into our Father’s house, a seat at our Father’s table, a place in our Father’s heart. As we have accepted Christ as our righteousness, we now have him as our escort if I may say so. All court privileges and royal favors which belong to him we now fearlessly claim as our own. We stand before God in the person of his Son.

THE CLOSING WORDS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS.

The four biographies of Christ, called “the four gospels,” are full of good tidings from beginning to end; they run over with wonders and blessings; for of him it was prophesied, “his name shall be called Wonderful,” and again, “men shall be blessed in him.” Each gospel is brief, each has its distinctive character and peculiar style, and from each we learn something not recorded by the rest.

But we will now look at the closing sentences of each, and compare and interweave these very remarkable testimonies, so as to leave a general view of what the Lord Jesus said and did, when just leaving that earth on which for more than thirty-three years he had lived a life of spotless purity and self-sacrificing benevolence, and where he had died a sacrificial death—all for the salvation and eternal life of sinners. The last three verses of Matthew, two of Mark, four of Luke, with John 20: 30, 31, and 21: 25 will furnish material for our meditation.

What lover of divine truth has not felt a sacred spell cast over him as the closing words of these grand, harmonious gospels have fallen on his ear, and distilled on his heart? The words of the poet have fittingly described his feelings:

“The angel ended, and in Adam’s ear,
So charming left his voice, that he awhile,
Thought him still speaking and stood fixed to hear.

Yes, let us stand still to hear; for though we may not expect to have any addition made to the revelation already possessed, while in this world, yea we may look for the Comforter, the glorifier of Jesus, to show us more of his excellencies, and to plant in our hearts those germs of truth of which the words and acts of the Incarnate One are so full.

Four objects meet our view as we contemplate the closing words of the four gospels.

1. The friend of sinners at the right hand of God.
2. A fountain of joy in the desert, which should ever flow on.
3. A field of labor which will always yield a rich return.
4. A fulness of truth and sympathy which can never be exhausted.

The evangelist Mark writes as follows: “So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” Here we have two things connected which do not often meet in the great of this world, i.e., ministry and majesty.

What a transition from standing on our sorrowful earth conversing and teaching, to sitting at the right hand of God! He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and who ministered unto the souls and bodies of men so untiringly and lovingly, is now seated on the eternal throne, “angels, principalities and powers being made subject unto him,” and these he sends forth to minister to his feeble people.

Thus did God reward his faithful service, and honor his obedience unto death, “even the death of the cross.” The sacred writers exult in the exaltation of Jesus; the testimonies on this point are very remarkable and extremely numerous. Let us seek fellowship with them in their adoring joy, that the Lamb once slain is “the Lamb in the midst of the throne;” that one in our nature is Head over all things to his Church.