

its practical importance, this doctrine perhaps presents fully as much to interest and attract as any other that has been made a subject of controversy.

The evidence bearing upon it extends nearly over the whole Bible,—the Old Testament as well as the New; for a great deal of evidence has been produced from the Old Testament that the Messiah promised to the fathers was a possessor of the divine nature, of divine perfections and prerogatives, and fully entitled to have applied to Him the incommunicable name of Jehovah. A great deal of learning and ability have been brought to bear upon the discussion of this question, both in establishing the truth, and in labouring to undermine and overthrow it. All the resources of minute criticism have been applied to the subject, and to everything that seemed to bear upon it; materials of all different kinds, and from all various sources, have been heaped up in the investigation of it. The discussion thus presents a sort of compendium of the whole science and art of biblical criticism, in the widest sense of the word,—the settling of the true text, in some important passages, by an examination of various readings,—the philological investigation of the true meaning of a considerable number of important words,—the application of grammatical and exegetical principles and rules to a great number of phrases, clauses, and sentences. All this is comprehended in a full discussion of the subject of our Lord's proper divinity. And there is, perhaps, no one doctrine to the disproof or overthrow of which materials of these different kinds, and from these various sources, have been more skilfully and perseveringly applied,—none in regard to which, by a better, and sounder, and more effective application of the same materials, a more certain and decisive victory has been gained for the cause of truth. Every point has been contested, and contested with some skill and vigour; but this has only made the establishment of the truth, in the ultimate result, the more palpable and the more undoubted.

For these reasons I have always been inclined to think, in opposition to some views put forth by Dr Chalmers,* that it is very desirable that a pretty full investigation of the subject of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ should come in at an early period in the study of the system of Christian theology. The study of

* Preface to his Collected Works, vol. i., pp. iv., etc. (Edrs.)

this subject leads to the consideration and application of many important principles, both of a more general and comprehensive, and of a more minute and special kind, intimately connected with the investigation of divine truth, and the critical interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, and is thus fitted to teach important lessons that bear upon the whole field of theological discussion. To the humble and honest reader of God's word, the divinity of the Saviour seems to be very plainly and fully taught there; and when men are first brought into contact with Socinian perversions, they are apt, if they have not previously studied the subject critically, to be startled with the plausibility attaching to some of their attempts to involve the evidences of the doctrine, or at least the precise meaning of some particular passages of Scripture, in doubt and uncertainty. On this account, it is all the more satisfactory in itself, and all the better fitted to suggest useful lessons of general application, to find, as the result of a more thorough and searching investigation, and of the most stringent application of the recognised rules of critical inquiry, that our first and most natural impressions of the meaning and import of scriptural statements are fully confirmed and conclusively established,—that the criticism, the learning, and the ingenuity of opponents are met and overborne, on the part of the advocates of the truth, by all these qualities in a much superior degree,—and thus to be brought deliberately and rationally to the conclusion, that what has been in all ages the faith of the humbly devout, though not learned and critical, readers of God's word, is indeed its true meaning, and can be satisfactorily established in all its parts by the highest learning, and the most accomplished and searching criticism.

One leading consideration that ought to be kept in view in the investigation of the scriptural evidence bearing on this subject is this,—that the object to be aimed at is to find out, from an examination of the *whole word* of God, what it is that He wished and intended us to believe regarding it. The Scriptures are manifestly not constructed upon the principle of giving us, in formal, general statements, or in single passages, the substance of what they are designed to teach us upon any particular topic. It was manifestly God's design, in the construction of His word, that men, in using it for the purpose which it was intended to serve, should be called upon to exercise diligence and research in

collecting and combining the scattered rays of light, possessed of different degrees of intensity, that bear upon any particular point, and in estimating from the combination of the whole the real character, complexion, and position of the object presented. This consideration is fitted to impress upon our minds the unreasonableness and unfairness of selecting a few particular statements,—laying *them* down as a basis or foundation,—and then setting ourselves to pervert or explain away all other statements which, at first view, it may not seem very easy to reconcile with those we may have thought proper to select as our favourites, in place of investigating *all* fairly and impartially,—ascertaining the combined result of all that the Bible has stated or indicated upon the subject,—and then dealing with this result in one or other of the only two ways which can be regarded as in any sense *rational* in such a case, namely, either submitting implicitly to the doctrine as revealed by God, or else rejecting wholly the revelation which contains it.

In accordance with this view, it is proper to give prominence to this general consideration, which ought ever to be remembered and applied,—namely, that Socinian and Arian doctrines, in regard to the Trinity and the person of Christ, are founded only upon a partial selection of scriptural statements, to the neglect and disregard, or rather, what is much worse, to the perversion and distortion, of many others; while the orthodox doctrine exhibits accurately and fully the combined result of all, giving to every class of scriptural statements its true and fair meaning and its right place; and by this very quality or circumstance is proved to be the true key for interpreting Scripture, and solving all the difficulties that may occur in the investigation of its various statements. That Jesus Christ is a man, a true and real man,—that He had a true body, and a reasonable or rational soul,—is a doctrine clearly taught in Scripture, because it is manifestly implied in, and absolutely indispensable to, a fair and honest interpretation of many of its statements; and it is accordingly held by all who call themselves Christians, by Trinitarians as well as by Socinians and Arians. But there are also passages which, when fairly interpreted, afford satisfactory evidence that Jesus Christ existed, and was in heaven, before He was born at Bethlehem, and before the creation of the world; and that in this state of pre-existence He possessed a superhuman nature,—a nature

higher and more exalted than that in which He presented Himself to men while upon earth. Now, all such statements the Socinians refuse to take into account, in forming their conceptions, or in settling their general doctrines about Christ; and they labour to vindicate their conduct in doing so, by exerting their utmost ingenuity in distorting and perverting their meaning, in order to make out some plausible grounds for alleging that they convey no such ideas as have been commonly deduced from them, and as they seem very evidently fitted to convey.

The Arians agree with us in holding, in opposition to the Socinians, that those passages *do* prove the pre-existence and superhuman dignity of Christ; and accordingly they admit these additional ideas;—additional, I mean, to that of His mere humanity,—into their doctrine concerning Him. But here they stop; and this is stopping short,—far short,—of the whole of what Scripture teaches us regarding Him, for it still leaves Him in the class of creatures. And we assert, and undertake to prove, that, in addition to those passages which prove His pre-existence and superhuman dignity,—and which, perhaps, taken by themselves, prove nothing more,—there are many passages which cannot be fairly and impartially investigated according to the strictest principles of criticism, without constraining men to believe that they were intended to represent to us Christ as possessed of true and proper divinity,—a possessor of the one divine nature, with all divine perfections and prerogatives. Of course, upon this ground, we insist that the Arian account of Christ, though fuller and more accurate than the Socinian, is yet fundamentally defective; and we maintain that, in order to express and embody the substance of *all* that Scripture teaches us concerning Him, we must hold that He existed not merely before the creation of the world, but from eternity,—not only in the possession of a superhuman, but of the one properly divine nature. This doctrine, and this alone, comes up to the full import of what is taught or indicated in Scripture concerning Him. When any part of it is left out or denied, then there are some scriptural statements—more or less few, of course, according to the extent of the omission or negation,—to which torture must be applied, in order to show that they do not express the ideas which they seem plainly fitted and intended to convey; whereas, when this great doctrine is admitted in all its extent, the whole demands of Scripture are satisfied,—no distortion or perversion

is required,—and there is the full satisfaction of having investigated fairly and honestly everything that God has said to us upon the subject, and of having implicitly submitted our understandings to His authority. What a mass of confusion and inconsistency the Bible presents,—how thoroughly unfitted is it to be the standard or directory of our faith,—if it be indeed true that Christ was a mere man, and that the Bible was *intended* to teach us this; whereas, if we admit and apply the orthodox doctrine that He was God and man in one person, then order and consistency at once appear,—difficulties are solved, otherwise insoluble,—apparent contradictions are removed,—and the whole body of the scriptural statements concerning Him are seen to be in entire harmony with each other, and to concur, all without force or straining, in forming one consistent and harmonious whole.

The same general consideration may be applied to other points comprehended in the doctrine commonly received upon this subject. Take, for instance, the personality of the Holy Spirit. It cannot be disputed that there are passages of Scripture which speak of the Spirit of God, and which contain, taken by themselves, no sufficient evidence of distinct personality. But if men rest here, and upon this ground deny that the Spirit is a distinct person in the Godhead, then they are refusing to take into account, and to receive in their fair and legitimate import, other passages in which the idea of distinct personality is clearly indicated, and which cannot, without great and unwarrantable straining, be interpreted so as to exclude or omit it. The same principle applies to the denial of Christ's eternal Sonship by those who admit His true and proper divinity. By admitting His true and proper divinity, they interpret rightly a large number of the scriptural statements regarding Him, which Socinians and Arians distort and pervert; and they receive what must be admitted to be most essential and fundamental truth in the scriptural views of Christ. But still, as we believe, they come short of what Scripture teaches concerning Him, by refusing to admit that, even as God, He is the Son of the Father,—that there existed from eternity a relation between the first and second persons of the Godhead, analogous, in some respects, to that subsisting between a father and a son among men; and we are persuaded that there are passages in Scripture to which a considerable amount of straining must be applied in order to exclude this idea.

The Scripture, however, was evidently constructed upon the principle not only of requiring, and *thereby testing*, men's diligence and impartiality in collecting and examining, in taking into account and applying, the *whole* of the materials which it furnishes, for regulating our judgment upon any particular point; but likewise upon the principle of requiring, and thereby testing, their real candour and love of truth, by providing only reasonable and satisfactory, and not overwhelming, evidence of the doctrines it was designed to teach. The peculiar doctrines of Christianity are not set forth in Scripture in such a way as to constrain the immediate assent of all who read its words, and are, in some sense, capable of understanding them; they are not there set forth in such a way as at once to preclude all difference of opinion and all cavilling, or to bid defiance to all attempts at distorting and perverting its statements. In short, startling as the position may at first sight appear, there is not one of the peculiar doctrines of the Christian system which is set forth in Scripture with such an amount of explicitness, and with such overwhelming evidence, as it was abstractly possible to have given to the statement and the proof of it, or in such a way as to deprive men, who are averse to the reception of its doctrines, of all plausible pretences for explaining away and perverting its statements, even while admitting their divine authority. No sane man ever doubted that the Nicene Creed and the Westminster Confession teach, and were intended to teach, by those who framed them, the true and proper divinity of the Son. But many men, to whom we cannot deny the possession of mental sanity, while we cannot but regard them as labouring under some ruinously perverting influences, have denied that the Scripture teaches this doctrine; they have argued strenuously in support of this denial, and have been able to produce some considerations in favour of their views, which are not altogether destitute of plausibility.

The explanation of this is, that Scripture was constructed upon the principle of testing our candour and love of truth, by leaving some opening for men who had little or no candour or love of truth rejecting the doctrines it was designed to teach, without either formally denying its authority, or openly renouncing all claim to sense or rationality, by advocating views in support of which nothing that was possessed even of plausibility could be alleged. The doctrine of the divinity of the

Son, in common with all the other peculiar doctrines of the Christian system, is set forth in Scripture with a force of evidence amply sufficient to satisfy every candid man,—every man who really desires to know the truth, to know what God has revealed regarding it,—with such evidence as that the rejection of it, of itself proves the existence and operation of a sinful state of mind, of a hatred of truth, and imposes a fearful responsibility; but not with such evidence as at once to secure and compel the assent of all who look at it, and to cut off the possibility of the assignation of some plausible grounds for rejecting it when men are led, by their dislike of the doctrine, and what it implies, to reject it. God is fully warranted in requiring us to believe whatever He has revealed, and accompanied with sufficient evidence of its truth, and to punish us for refusing our assent in these circumstances; and it is in accordance with the general principles of His moral administration, to test or try men by giving them evidence of what He wishes and requires them to believe, that is amply sufficient, without being necessarily overwhelming,—that shall certainly satisfy all who examine it with candour and a real desire to know the truth,—and that *may* leave in ignorance and error those who do not bring these qualities to the investigation.

The Socinians would demand for the proof of Christ's divinity a kind and amount of evidence that is altogether unreasonable. We formerly had occasion, in considering the general principles on which Socinians proceed in the interpretation of Scripture, to expose the unreasonableness of their demand, that we must show that the scriptural statements which we produce in support of our doctrines, not only *may*, but *must*, bear the meaning we ascribe to them, and cannot possibly admit of any other. We acknowledge, indeed, that it is not enough for us to show that Scripture statements *may* bear the meaning we attach to them; and we contend that there are statements about Christ of which it might be fairly said that they *must* bear our sense, and cannot possibly—that is, consistently with the principles of sound criticism and the dictates of common sense—admit of any other. But we do not acknowledge that the establishment of this second position is indispensable to making out our case, for there is a medium between the two extremes,—of proving merely, on the one hand, that certain statements may possibly admit of the meaning we ascribe to them;

and, on the other hand, proving that they cannot possibly admit of any other meaning. This intermediate position is this,—that upon a fair examination of the statements, and an impartial application to them of the recognised principles and rules of interpretation, we have sufficient materials for satisfying ourselves, and for convincing others, that *this*, and not anything different from it, is their true meaning,—the meaning which it is right and proper, if we would act uprightly and impartially, to ascribe to them. This is enough. This should satisfy reasonable and candid men. This fully warrants us to maintain, as it affords us sufficient materials to prove, that this is the meaning which they were *intended* to bear,—that these are the ideas which they were *intended* to convey to us. It must of course be assumed, in all such investigations, that the one object to be aimed at is to ascertain the true meaning of Scripture,—the meaning which the words bear, and were intended to bear. When this is once ascertained, we have what we are bound to regard as the doctrine which the author of Scripture *wished*, *intended*, and *expected* us to adopt upon His authority. It must further be assumed that the words were intended to convey to us the meaning which they are *fitted* to convey; so that the inquiry is virtually limited to this, What is the meaning which these words, in themselves, and in their connection, *are fitted* to convey to us, when fairly and impartially investigated by the recognised rules of philology, grammar, and criticism, as they apply to this matter?

The results brought out in this way we are bound to receive as exhibiting the true, real, and intended meaning of Scripture, and to deal with them accordingly. Cases may occur in which we may not be able to reach any very certain conclusion as to the true meaning of a particular statement,—in which, of several senses that may be suggested, we may, after examining the matter, be at a loss to decide which is the true meaning,—that is, we may not be able to attain to more than probability upon the point. There are such statements in Scripture, and of course they must be dealt with honestly, according to their true character, and the real evidence of the case, as it fairly applies to them. But these statements are very few, and *comparatively* unimportant. We can, in general, in the fair, diligent, and persevering use of appropriate materials, attain to a clear conviction as to what the true meaning of scriptural statements is,—what is the sense which they are

fitted, and of course intended, to convey to us; and this we should regard as settling the question, and satisfying our judgment, even though there may remain some ground for cavilling,—something not altogether destitute of plausibility that might be alleged in favour of the *possibility* of their bearing a different sense. In regard to the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, the evidence is full, complete, and conclusive, that the Scriptures are fitted to teach us these doctrines,—to convey to us, to impress upon us, the ideas that constitute them; and, of course, that the Author of the Scriptures intended and expected, nay, demands at our peril, that we shall believe upon His authority, that “in the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity,—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and that God the Son became man.”

We conclude with a few remarks upon the importance of this doctrine, and the responsibility connected with the admission or denial of it. When we reflect upon the fulness and clearness with which the divinity of Christ—which, as we formerly explained, may be said practically to carry with it the whole doctrine of the Trinity—is revealed to us in Scripture, we cannot regard those who refuse to receive it in any other light than as men who have determined that they will not submit *their* understandings to the revelation which God has given us. They are refusing to receive the record which He has given us concerning Himself and concerning His Son, in its substance and fundamental features; and they are doing so under the influence of motives and tendencies which manifestly imply determined rebellion against God’s authority, and which would effectually lead them to reject any revelation He might give that did not harmonize with their fancies and inclinations. It is evident from the nature of the case, and from the statements of Scripture, that the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ are of essential and fundamental importance in the Christian scheme. Whether we view the gospel theoretically, as a system of doctrines intended to enlighten our understandings in the knowledge of God and of divine things, or more practically, as intended to bear upon the formation of the character, and the regulation of the motives of men, the admission or denial of the doctrine of three distinct persons in the unity of the Godhead, and of the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ, must evidently affect fundamentally its

whole character and influence. To the second person in the Godhead is assigned the work of satisfying divine justice, and of reconciling us to God; and to the third person is assigned the work of renewing our moral natures, and preparing us for the enjoyment of happiness. And God has made our enjoyment of the blessings of salvation dependent upon our knowing something of the nature of these blessings, and of the way and manner in which they have been procured and are bestowed.

If the Son and the Holy Ghost are not truly divine,—partakers of the one divine nature,—we are guilty of idolatry in bestowing upon them divine honours; and if they are divine, we are, in refusing to pay them divine honours, robbing God of what is due to Him, and of what He is demanding of us. Christ has Himself uttered this most solemn and impressive declaration, “that God hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that (in order that, or with a view to secure that) all men might honour the Son, even as they honour the Father;” where we are plainly enjoined to give the same honour to the Son as to the Father, and where the injunction is sanctioned by an express assertion of the certainty of its bearing upon the proceedings of the day of judgment, and the decision then to be pronounced upon our eternal destinies. What, indeed, is Christianity, without a divine Saviour? In what essential respect does it differ, if Christ was a mere man, or even a creature, from Mahomedanism, or from the mere light of nature? How can two systems of doctrine, or two provisions for accomplishing any moral object, have the same influence and result, which are, and must be, so different, so opposite in their fundamental views and arrangements, as the doctrines maintained by the advocates and opponents of Christ’s proper Godhead. Accordingly, it has held universally, that according as men admitted or denied the divinity of Christ, have their whole notions about the gospel method of salvation been affected. On the divinity of Christ are evidently suspended the doctrine of atonement, or satisfaction for sin, and the whole method of justification; in short, everything that bears most vitally upon men’s eternal welfare. Our Saviour Himself has expressly declared, “It is eternal life to know Thee (addressing His Father), the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent,”*—a statement which does not

* John xvii. 3.

prove, as anti-Trinitarians allege, that the Father is the only true God, to the exclusion of the Son, because this is not *necessarily* involved in it, and because to interpret it in this way would make Scripture contradict itself, as in another passage it expressly calls Jesus Christ the true God and eternal life,* and affords us most abundant materials for believing that He is so; but which *does prove* that a knowledge of Jesus Christ must consist in the perception, the maintenance, and the application of the *real* views regarding Him, which are actually taught in the sacred Scriptures,—in knowing Him *as* He is there revealed,—and in cherishing towards Him all those feelings, and discharging towards Him all those duties, which the scriptural representations of His nature and person are fitted to produce or to impose. This is eternal life; and the men who, having in their hands the record which God has given concerning His Son, refuse to honour Him, even as they honour the Father,—to pay Him divine honour, as being a possessor of the divine nature,—and to confide in Him, as a divine and almighty Saviour,—must be regarded as judging themselves unworthy of this eternal life, as deliberately casting it away from them.

* 1 John v. 20.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT.

THE incarnation of the second person of the Godhead,—the assumption of human nature by One who from eternity had possessed the divine nature, so that He was God and man in one person,—is, as a subject of contemplation, well fitted to call forth the profoundest reverence, and to excite the strongest emotions; and if it was indeed a reality, must have been intended to accomplish most important results. If Christ really was God and man in one person, we may expect to find, in the object thus presented to our contemplation, much that is mysterious—much that we cannot fully comprehend; while we should also be stirred up to examine with the utmost care everything that has been revealed to us regarding it, assured that it must possess no ordinary interest and importance. He who is represented to us in Scripture as being God and man in one person, is also described as the only Mediator between God and man—as the only Saviour of sinners. If it be indeed true, as the Scripture plainly teaches, that the divine and human natures were united in His one person, it is undeniable that this union must have been formed in order to the salvation of sinners, and that the plan which God devised and executed for saving sinners, must just consist in, or be based upon, what Christ, as God and man in one person, *did*, in order to effect this object. This was the work which the Father gave Him to do; and by doing it He has secured the deliverance from everlasting misery, and the eternal blessedness, of as many as the Father has given Him,—“an innumerable company, which no man can number, out of every kindred, and nation, and people, and tongue.”

Sec. I.—Connection between the Person and Work of Christ.

In systematic expositions of the scheme of divine truth, the subject of the person of the Mediator, or the scriptural account

of who and what Christ was, is usually followed by the subject of the work of Christ, or the account of what He did for the salvation of sinners. The terms commonly employed by theologians to describe in general the work of Christ as Mediator, are *munus* and *officium*; and divines of almost all classes have admitted, that the leading features of the scriptural representations of what Christ did for the salvation of sinners, might be fully brought out, by ascribing to Him the three offices of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King, and by unfolding what it was He did in the execution of these three offices.

It is plain, from the nature of the case, that the subjects of the person and the work of Christ must be, in fact and in doctrine, intimately connected with each other. If the Mediator was God and man in one person, then we might confidently expect that He would do, and that it would be necessary for Him to do, in order to the salvation of sinners, what no man, what no creature, was competent to do. And when we survey what Scripture seems to hold up to us as the work which He wrought for our salvation, we can scarcely fail to be impressed with the conviction, that, from its very nature, it required one who was possessed of infinite perfection and excellence to accomplish it. Accordingly, we find that the admission or denial of Christ's divinity has always affected fundamentally the whole of men's views in regard to almost everything in the scheme of salvation, and especially in regard to Christ's mediatorial work.

Socinians, holding that Christ was a mere man, teach, in perfect consistency with this, that He did nothing for the salvation of men except what may be comprehended under the general head or description of revealing, confirming, and illustrating truth or doctrine, and of setting us an example,—a work to which any creature, even a mere man, of course employed and qualified by God for the purpose, was perfectly competent. Arians,—holding Christ to be a superhuman, but still a created, and not a divine or infinite being,—are accustomed, in accordance with this view of the person of the Mediator, to introduce an additional and somewhat higher notion into their representation of the nature of His work. It is, in substance, that of *influence* exerted by Him with God, in order to prevail upon Him to pardon sinners and admit them into the enjoyment of His favour. Christ, as a highly exalted creature, who took a deep interest in the salvation of

sinners, and was willing to endure, and did endure, humiliation and suffering on their account, did what was very meritorious in itself and very acceptable to God; and thus acquired such influence with God, as that He consented, at Christ's request, and from a regard to Him, and to what He had done, to forgive sinners, and to bestow upon them spiritual blessings. This is, in substance, the view entertained of the general nature of Christ's work by those who regard Him as an exalted, superangelic creature; and I fear that a vague impression of something similar to this, and not going much beyond it, floats in the minds of many amongst us, who have never thought or speculated on religious subjects. Almost all who have held the doctrine of Christ's proper divinity, have also believed that His sufferings and death were vicarious,—that is, that they were endured in the room and stead of sinners,—and have regarded the most important, peculiar, and essential features of His mediatorial work to be His substitution in our room and stead,—the satisfaction which He rendered to divine justice,—though it must be admitted, that there have been differences of opinion, of no small importance, among those who have concurred in maintaining these general scriptural truths with respect both to the person and the work of Christ.

It is one of the peculiar features of the theology of the present day, that this remarkable and important connection of great principles is overlooked or denied. There are many in the present day, who make a profession of believing in the proper divinity, and even in the eternal Sonship, of the Saviour, who yet deny the doctrine that has been generally held in the Christian church concerning the atonement, and put forth, upon this point, notions substantially the same as those of the Socinians and Arians. They give prominence to the mere incarnation of Christ, without connecting and combining it with His sufferings and death, and with His fulfilment of all righteousness in their room and stead, resolving it into a mere manifestation of the divine character and purposes, intended to make an impression upon our minds. But they have not succeeded in bringing out anything like an adequate cause for so remarkable a peculiarity as the assumption of human nature by the second person of the Godhead; while a confirmation of the great principles we have laid down about the connection of doctrine is to be found in the fact, that the views of these men, even about the divinity of the Son, however plausibly they

may sometimes be put forth, turn out, when carefully examined, to be materially different from those which have been usually held in the Christian church, as taught in Scripture; and resolve very much into a kind of Platonic Sabellianism, which explains away any really personal distinction in the Godhead, and thus becomes virtually identified with the ordinary view of Socinians or Unitarians. The fact that influential writers in the present day make a profession of believing in the divinity and incarnation of the Saviour, while denying His vicarious and satisfactory atonement, is a reason why we should make it an object to understand and develop fully the connection between these two great departments of scriptural truth; to perceive and to explain,—so far as Scripture affords any materials for doing so,—how the one leads to and supports the other,—how the incarnation and atonement of our Lord are closely and indissolubly connected together,—and how, in combination, they form the ground and basis of all our hopes.*

There is a manifest enough congruity between the three distinctive schemes of doctrine, as to the person of the Mediator, and the corresponding opinions with respect to His work; and there would, of course, be nothing strange in this, if the whole subject were one of mere intellectual speculation, in regard to which men were warranted and called upon to follow out their own views to all their legitimate logical results. But since all parties profess to derive their views upon this subject from the statements of Scripture, exactly and critically interpreted, it is somewhat singular that they should all *find in Scripture* a line of different opinions in regard to Christ's work running parallel to a corresponding series in regard to His person. The fact affords too good reasons for the conclusion, that it is very common for men, even when professing to be simply investigating the meaning of scriptural statements, to be greatly, if not chiefly, influenced by certain previous notions of a general kind, which, whether upon good grounds or not, they have been led to form, as to what Scripture does say, or should say; and is thus fitted to impress upon us the important lesson, that if we would escape the guilt of

* This paragraph is taken from Sermon delivered by Dr Cunningham at the opening of the General Assembly of the Free Church, 17th May 1860. (Edrs.)

distorting and perverting the whole word of God, and of misunderstanding the whole scheme of salvation, we must be very careful to derive all our views, upon matters of religious doctrine, from the sacred Scripture, in place of getting them from some other source, and then bringing them to it, and virtually employing them, more or less openly and palpably, to overrule its authority, and to pervert its meaning.

I have said that it has been the general practice of theologians since the Reformation, to expound the scriptural doctrine concerning the work of Christ as Mediator, in the way of ascribing to Him the three distinct offices of a Prophet, a Priest, and a King; and then classifying and illustrating, under these three heads, the different departments of the work which He wrought for the salvation of sinners. This division, if represented and applied as one which certainly comprehends and exhausts the subject, cannot be said to have *direct* scriptural authority; and yet there is enough in Scripture to suggest and warrant the adoption of it, as a useful and convenient arrangement, though nothing to warrant us in drawing inferences or conclusions from it, as if it were both accurate and complete. The ground or warrant for it is this:—that it is very easy to prove from Scripture that Christ, as Mediator, is a Prophet, a Priest, and a King; that He executed the functions of these three different offices; and that all the leading departments of His work,—of what He did for the salvation of sinners, as it is set before us in Scripture,—fall naturally and easily under the ordinary and appropriate functions of these different offices. The propriety and utility of this division have been a good deal discussed by some continental writers. Ernesti—who was, however, much more eminent as a critic than as a theologian—laboured to show, in a dissertation, “*De officio Christi triplici*,” published in his *Opuscula Theologica*,* that the division has no sanction from Scripture, and is fitted only to introduce confusion and error; and his views and arguments have been adopted by Doederlein, Morus, and Knapp.† There is, however, very little force in their objections, and the division continues still to be generally adopted by the most eminent continental theo-

* P. 371, ed. 1792.

† Doederlein, *Institutio Theologiae*, pp. 334–336. *Vide also* Mori Christiani, § 305, Pars. ii., p. 507. Knapp's Lectures on Christian Theology, pp. 193–194. *Vide also* Mori Christiani, § 305, Pars. ii., p. 507. Epitome, p. 193.

gians of the present day. The leading point which the opponents of this division labour to establish is, that in Scripture the functions of these different offices are not *always* exactly discriminated from each other. But this position, even though proved, is very little to the purpose: for it can scarcely be disputed that Scripture does afford us sufficient materials for forming pretty definite conceptions of the respective natures and functions of these three offices, as distinct from each other; and that, in point of fact, the leading departments of Christ's work admit easily and naturally of being classed under the heads of the appropriate functions of these three offices, as the Scripture *ordinar'ly* discriminates them. This is quite sufficient to sanction the distinction as unobjectionable, useful, and convenient; while, of course, as it proves nothing of itself, all must admit the obligation lying upon those who make use of it to produce distinct and satisfactory scriptural proof of every position they maintain, as to the nature, object, and effects of anything that Christ is alleged to have done in the execution of these different offices.

It may be described in general, as the characteristic of the Socinian system of theology upon this subject, that it regards Christ merely as a Prophet,—that is, merely as revealing and establishing truths or doctrines concerning God and divine things,—while it denies that He executed the office of a Priest or of a King. But while this is true in *substance*, there are one or two explanations that may assist us in understanding the discussions which occur upon this subject among the older theologians. The original Socinians, as I have already had occasion to mention, usually admitted that Christ executed the office of a King, and they did not altogether, and in every sense, deny that He executed the office of a Priest; while they conjoined or confounded the priestly and the kingly offices. I then explained, that though very far from being deficient either in ingenuity or in courage, they were unable to evade the evidence that Christ, after His resurrection, was raised to a station of exalted power, which in some way or other He employed for promoting the spiritual and eternal welfare of men. Their leading position, in regard to Christ's priestly office, was, that He did not execute it at all upon earth, but only after His ascension to heaven; and that, of course, His sufferings and death formed no part of it,—these being intended merely to afford us an example of virtue, and to confirm and establish the doctrine of the im-

mortality of the soul. The execution of His priestly office did not commence till after His ascension, and was only an aspect or modification of the kingly office, or of the exercise of the powers with which He had been invested; while everything connected with the objects to which this power was directed, or the way and manner in which it was exercised, was left wholly unexplained. Modern Socinians, having discovered that Scripture gives us no definite information as to the place which Christ now occupies, and the manner in which He is now engaged; and being satisfied that all that is said in Scripture about His priesthood is wholly figurative,—and, moreover, that *the figure means nothing*, real or true, being taken from mere Jewish notions,—have altogether discarded both the priestly and the kingly offices, and have thus brought out somewhat more plainly and openly, what the old Socinians held in substance, though they conveyed it in a more scriptural phraseology.

It is under the head of the priestly office of Christ that the great and infinitely important subject of His satisfaction or atonement is discussed; and this may be regarded as the most peculiar and essential feature of the work which He wrought, as Mediator, for the salvation of sinners,—that which stands in most immediate and necessary connection with the divinity of His person. We can conceive it possible that God might have given us a very full revelation of His will, and abundantly confirmed the certainty of the information which He communicated, as well as have set before us a complete pattern of every virtue for our imitation, *through the instrumentality of a creature, or even of a mere man*. We can conceive a creature exalted by God to a very high pitch of power and dignity, and made the instrument, in the exercise of this power, of accomplishing very important results bearing upon the spiritual and eternal welfare of men. But when the ideas of satisfying the divine justice and the divine law, in the room and stead of sinners,—and *thereby* reconciling men to God, whose law they had broken,—are presented to our minds, and in some measure realized, here we cannot but be impressed with the conviction, that if these ideas describe actual realities, we have got into a region in which there is no scope for the agency or operation of a mere creature, and in which infinite power and perfection are called for. We are not, indeed, to imagine that we fully and rightly understand the prophetic office of the Mediator, unless we regard the great Revealer of God as one who was the brightness of His glory and the express

image of His person,—as having been from eternity in the bosom of the Father. And it is proper also to remember, that we can scarcely conceive it to be possible that the actual power and dominion which the Scriptures ascribe to Christ as Mediator, and which He is ever exercising in the execution of His kingly office,—including, as it does, the entire government of the universe, and the absolute disposal of the everlasting destinies of all men,—*could* be delegated to, and exercised by, any creature, however exalted. We only wish to remark, that the general ideas of revealing God's will, and exercising power or dominion,—which may be said to constitute the essence of the doctrine concerning the prophetic and kingly offices of Christ,—are more within the range of our ordinary conceptions; and that though, in point of fact, applicable to Christ in a way in which they could not apply to any creature, yet they do not of themselves suggest so readily the idea of *the necessity of a divine Mediator* as those which are commonly associated with the priestly office. The priestly office, accordingly, has been the principal subject of controversial discussion, both from its more immediate connection with the proper divinity of Christ's person, and from its more extensive and influential bearing upon all the provisions and arrangements of the scheme of salvation.

It is very manifest, on the most cursory survey of the sacred Scriptures, that the salvation of sinners is ascribed to the sufferings and death of Christ,—that His sufferings and death are represented as intimately connected with, and influentially bearing upon, this infinitely important result. Indeed, the whole subject which is now under consideration may be regarded, in one aspect of it, as virtually resolving into the investigation of this question,—What is the relation subsisting between the sufferings and death of Christ and the salvation of sinners? In what precise way do they bear upon men's obtaining or receiving the forgiveness of their sins and the enjoyment of God's favour? And in further considering this subject, it will be convenient, for the sake both of distinctness and brevity, to advert only to the *death* of Christ; for though most of the advocates of the generally received doctrine of the atonement regard the whole of Christ's humiliation and sufferings, from His incarnation to His crucifixion, as invested with a priestly, sacrificial, and piacular character,—as constituting His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice,—as *all propitiatory* of God, and *expiatory* of men's sins,—yet, in accordance with the general

representations of Scripture, they regard His oblation or sacrifice of Himself, as a piacular victim, as principally manifested, and as concentrated in His pouring out His soul unto death,—His bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. And we may also, for the same reasons,—and because we do not intend at present to discuss the whole subject of justification, and the bearing of Christ's work upon all that is implied in that word,—speak generally, and in the first instance, in adverting to the object to be effected, of the pardon or forgiveness of men's sins,—an expression *sometimes* used in Scripture as virtually including or implying the whole of our salvation, because it is a fundamental part of it, and because it may be justly regarded as, in some respects, the primary thing to be attended to in considering our relation to God and our everlasting destinies.

We have already stated generally the different doctrines or theories which have been propounded,—all professing to rest upon scriptural authority,—in regard to the connection between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of men's sins, taking these two expressions in the sense now explained. The Socinian doctrine* is, that the death of Christ bears upon this result merely by confirming and illustrating truths, and by setting an example of virtue; and thus affording motives and encouragements to the exercise of repentance and the performance of good actions, by which we ourselves procure or obtain for ourselves the forgiveness of sin and the enjoyment of God's favour,—its whole power and efficacy being thus placed in the confirmation of truth and in the exhibition of exemplary virtue. The doctrine commonly held by Arians is, that Christ, by submitting to suffering and to death, on men's account, and with a view to their benefit, has done what was very acceptable to God, and has thus obtained a position of influence with God, which He exercises by interceding in some way or other for the purpose of procuring for men forgiveness and favour. Now, it may be said to be true, that the Scripture does ascribe these effects to the death of Christ, and that, of course, that event is fitted, and was intended, to produce them. The death of Christ was a testimony to truths, and is well adapted to establish and illustrate them, though *what* these truths *are* must depend essentially upon what that event *was* in its whole character and bearing.

* See summary of the Socinian doctrine given in Grotius, *De Satisfactione*, | c. viii., p. 168, and c. x., p. 206; c. i., pp. 40-44. Ed. 1661.

It is fitted, and of course was intended, to afford us motives and encouragements to repentance and holiness. This is true, but it is very far from being the whole of the truth upon the subject. It is likewise true that Scripture sanctions the general idea of Christ—by suffering and dying for the sake of men—doing what was pleasing and acceptable to God,—of His being in consequence rewarded, and raised to a position of high power and dignity,—and of His interceding with God, or using influence with Him, to procure for men spiritual blessings. All this is true, and it is held by those who maintain the commonly received doctrine of the atonement. But neither is this the whole of the truth which Scripture teaches upon the subject. And what in it is true, as thus generally expressed, is not brought out so fully and explicitly, as the Scripture affords us ample materials for doing, by connecting it with the doctrine of the atonement.

Some men would fain persuade us that the substance of all that Scripture teaches us concerning the way of salvation is this,—that an exalted and glorious Being interposed on behalf of sinners,—mediated between them and an offended God; and by this interposition and influence procured for them the forgiveness of their sins, and the enjoyment of God's favour. Now, all this is true. There is nothing in this general statement which contradicts or opposes anything that is taught us in Scripture. But, just as the Scripture affords us, as we have seen, abundant materials for defining much more fully and explicitly the real nature, dignity, and position of this exalted Being, and leaves us not to mere vague generalities upon this point, but warrants and requires us to believe and maintain that He was of the same nature and substance with the Father, and equal in power and glory; so, in like manner, in regard to what He *did* for men's salvation, the Scripture does not leave us to the vague generalities of His mediating or interposing, interceding or using influence, on our behalf, but affords us abundant materials for explaining much more precisely and definitely the nature or kind of His mediation or interposition,—the foundation of His intercession,—the ground or source of His influence. The commonly received doctrine of the satisfaction or atonement of Christ just professes to bring out this more full and specific information; and the substance of it is this,—that *the way and manner* in which He mediated or interposed in behalf of sinners, and in order to effect their deliverance or salvation, was

by putting Himself in their place,—by substituting Himself in their room and stead,—suffering, as their *substitute or surety*, the penalty of the law which they had broken, the punishment which they had deserved by their sins,—and thereby satisfying the claims of divine justice, and thus reconciling them to God. This great scriptural doctrine is thus expressed in our Confession of Faith: * “The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him;” or, in the words of the Shorter Catechism, “Christ executeth the office of a Priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.”

Here I may remark, as illustrating some preceding observations,—though this is not a topic which I mean to dwell upon,—that His intercession succeeds, and is based upon, His sacrifice and satisfaction; and that thus distinctness and definiteness are given to the idea which it expresses. When men's deliverance, or their possession of spiritual blessings, is ascribed, in general, to the intercession of Christ, without being accompanied with an exposition of His vicarious sacrifice and satisfaction, *as the ground or basis on which it rests*, no more definite meaning can be attached to it than merely that of *using some influence*, in order to procure for men what they need from God. But when His vicarious sacrifice and satisfaction are first asserted as the great leading department of the work which He wrought for the salvation of sinners, and His intercession is *then* introduced as following this, and based upon it, we escape from this vague generality, and are warranted and enabled to represent His intercession as implying that He pleads with God, in behalf of men, and in order to obtain for them the forgiveness of their sins, this most relevant and weighty consideration,—*viz.*, that He has suffered in their room, that He has endured in their stead the whole penalty which their sins had deserved.

The great doctrine, that Christ offered Himself as a vicarious sacrifice,—that is, a sacrifice in the room and stead of sinners, as

* C. viii., s. 5.