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A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE X.

DR. BUSHNELL'S FORGIVENESS AND LAW.¹

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THIS new volume on the atonement, from the pen of Dr. Bushnell, is due to "the unexpected arrival of fresh light," which required him to make a large revision of the latter part of his former treatise, *The Vicarious Sacrifice*. It is characterized by the author's well-known excellences and defects of style, and bears throughout his unmistakable image and superscription. It is valuable, if for nothing else, as a new testimony to the inadequacy of the "moral view" of the atonement which he has so ably advocated.

The central idea of the volume is developed in the first chapter, entitled, *Forgiveness and Propitiation without Expiation*. Here we find the principal modification which Dr. Bushnell has made of the doctrine of his *Vicarious Sacrifice*. Formerly he held that the atonement—including the whole work of Christ, his life and death—propitiated men only, not God. He now holds that it propitiated God as well as men. It did this, however, not by being vicarious punishment, satisfying justice, nor by being vicarious suffering, meeting an exigency of the divine government; but simply by moral reaction, or by the reflex influence of the sacrifice involved on the divine feelings. The analogon of this propitiation is found in human experience. Good men have certain moral resentments and indignations, awakened by the wrongs they suffer, which hinder them from forgiving, and which can be placated and overcome only by cost and sacrifice in behalf of the wrong-doer. "Human forgivenesses are possible to be consummated only by the help of some placation, or atonement, or cost-making." "Some alterative must be taken by the man who will truly forgive, that has power to liquefy the indifferences, or assuage the stern, overloaded displeasures of his moral, and morally injured, morally revolted, nature" (p. 48). There is a like obstacle to the divine forgiveness, which must be overcome in like manner. God "is put in arms against wrong-doers, just as we are, by his moral disgusts, displeasures, abhorrences, indignations, revulsions, and what is more than all, by his offended holiness." These antagonistic feelings are

¹ *Forgiveness and Law; Grounded on Principles interpreted by Human Analogies*. By Horace Bushnell. New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co. 1874.

placated by what God does in and through Christ to reclaim and save sinners. In propitiating them at great cost and sacrifice he is himself propitiated. Such is Dr. Bushnell's new theory of the atonement. Among the objections to it which readily suggest themselves, are the following :

1. It is not a fact that human forgiveness is universally and necessarily conditioned upon self-sacrifice. In cases of private wrong good men often forgive the wrong-doer instantly upon his repentance. They need nothing beyond Christian love to "liquefy their indifferences, and assuage the stern, overloaded displeasures of their moral nature." They do not let the sun go down on their wrath, even though the repetition of the offence and the penitence reach seventy times seven. This theory of the impossibility of complete forgiveness, except after and by means of cost and sacrifice, is a libel on the piety of some of the saintliest men and women who have ever lived to bless the world.

2. If it were a fact that men universally fail to forgive until propitiated by the reflex influence of their benevolent endeavors and sacrifices in behalf of those who have wronged them, the proper inference would be, not that the same is true of God, but that the best of men are weak and sinful, which is certainly the case. The difficulty with good men in exercising forgiveness results from their imperfections. Dr. Bushnell, himself, says that "the holiest men, who are the men most deeply wounded by wrong, forgive most easily" (p. 56). Were they still holier they would forgive still more easily; and were they perfectly holy there would be nothing in their nature to prevent the instant and spontaneous outflow of forgiveness. Good men always feel self-condemned if they do not immediately and heartily forgive a penitent enemy, although they have done nothing to bring him to repentance. The three cases which our author brings forward in illustration of his point fail, because the difficulty which these men had in forgiving sprung from a wrong state of feeling, and their painstaking and sacrifice only served to put them into a right state of feeling. But God's feelings are never wrong, requiring to be set right by the expedient of self-sacrifice.

3. If this theory be true, it must be impossible, in many cases, for men to exercise forgiveness. We cannot always make sacrifices in behalf of those who have wronged us. We may have no opportunity to relieve their poverty, or minister to them in sickness. They may become penitent before it is in our power to show them the slightest kindness. Must we then forever retain our resentments towards them, and never from the heart forgive?

4. This theory is based upon a false idea of forgiveness. Dr. Bushnell says that forgiveness "is a purely personal matter, — a strictly personal settlement, that, and that only." This may be true where the wrong is wholly private and personal; but where the wrong is public, against

society, against government, a violation of law, then forgiveness includes not merely a pacification of personal resentments but the remission of deserved penalty. An earthly ruler may lay aside or overcome all those feelings of moral indignation which a certain crime awakened, and yet not be able to forgive the criminal, and open his prison-doors. The public good may demand of him the infliction of the incurred penalty. God is a ruler, and sin against him is more than a personal offence, it is a wrong to the universe; and the punishment which it deserves, the good of the universe may require to be inflicted. The divine forgiveness of sin includes then the non-infliction of the penalty annexed to the divine law, and is more than a personal settlement, and can be rightly exercised only when the public weal will not thereby be endangered. According to this view of forgiveness it is evident that the efficacy of the atonement in securing forgiveness consists not in its reflex influence on God, assuaging his resentments, so much as in its meeting an exigency of government, by making such a revelation of God that no harm shall come to the universe when he forgives penitent sinners—a revelation of God which answers the same moral ends as would be answered by the revelation of God made in the infliction of deserved punishment.

5. This theory of the atonement is dishonorable to God. Despite all that Dr. Bushnell so ingeniously says to the contrary, it virtually attributes to God moral weakness and imperfection. To say that he cannot forgive, owing to certain “unreducible sentiments that hinder his love in forgiveness he otherwise might bestow,” is really to say, either that his love is defective, or that he lacks self-control and ability to do as he would. If these sentiments are voluntary, and interfere with love, they are morally wrong; if they are involuntary, and yet interfere with love, they are an imperfection.

6. This theory of the atonement involves the worst elements of the “satisfaction theory,” which Dr. Bushnell so sharply and justly criticizes. What he calls the “moral disgusts, displeasures, abhorrences, indignations, and revulsions” which sin excites in God, old-school men would call retributive justice. Indeed, Dr. Bushnell himself, in one instance, calls the corresponding sentiments in man, “that unreducible something, that dumb agony of justice, that disallows forgiveness,” until “smoothed and soothed and taken away.” According to both theories, then, God cannot forgive sinners until in some way his retributive justice is appeased, assuaged, soothed, satisfied.

7. This theory of the atonement finds no support in the scriptures. Dr. Bushnell does not profess to have derived it from the scriptures. He first establishes his theory, as he thinks, by analogical reasoning, and then turns to the Bible to see if he can there find any confirmation of it. We may well be suspicious of the correctness of any view of the atonement which is not primarily suggested by the scriptures themselves. They are

our chief source of knowledge in regard to this whole subject. They set forth the great work of Christ, (a) by prophecies concerning him; (b) by sacrifices which foreshadowed him; (c) by the historic account of his life and death; (d) by dogmatic statements, literal and figurative; (e) by divinely chosen analogies. It is by studying these prophecies, these sacrifices, this history, these statements, and these analogies that we shall be likely to arrive at the truth in regard to the design and efficacy of the atonement.

Dr. Bushnell, of course, finds it very easy to prove what he once denied, — that the scriptures teach that “There is a propitiation (of God) accomplished in Christ's life, and especially in his very tragic death, which prepares a way of forgiveness for the sins of the world.” Here he simply stands on common orthodox ground. But to prove the fact of propitiation is not to prove the *quo modo* of it. And not a particle of scriptural evidence is adduced to show that God is propitiated by the reflex influence of the cost and sacrifice involved in the life and death of Christ.

In the second chapter, entitled, *Law and Commandment*, Dr. Bushnell completes his revision of his former views of the atonement. This part of his revision, however, simply amounts to this, that “certain terms of our atonement language,” formerly discarded by him, now “get a qualified permission.”

In this chapter he discusses, in a very interesting, but unsatisfactory manner, the relation of the work of Christ to the law. He attempts to establish a distinction between law and commandment, but is no more successful than he was in his attempt in *The Vicarious Sacrifice* to establish a distinction between impersonal law and instituted government.

It was a singular fancy which led him to make the term “commandment” cover not only the express commandments of Christ, but “all that is commended to man's conscience and feelings by his life and death.” In the proper sense of the word, a divine commandment, whether given by Christ or otherwise, is only a specific requirement of the law. Christ lays upon men nothing which is not included in his own summary of the law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.” Love — holy, impartial, unselfish love — is the sum of what Christ requires of men, and this love, just so far as it is exercised, is the fulfilling of the law. The contrast which Dr. Bushnell draws, and somewhat exaggerates, is really between law and gospel, not between law and commandment.

The gospel gives to men no new standard of life and duty, but only restates and sets in a new and more attractive light the old standard of the law. That the gospel introduces new motives and influences to encourage and stimulate and help men in the exercise of that love which the law requires, is what no one denies. But, in emphasizing this point, Dr.

Bushnell makes what seem to be very rash and unwarranted statements concerning the law. "The law of God," he says, "is not a perfect institute in itself, and was never meant to be. . . . The law, by itself, is not expected or intended to result in any complete form of personal virtue or character" (pp. 107, 109). And yet the Psalmist declares: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"; and Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law: "The man that doeth these things shall live by them."

Again, Dr. Bushnell says the law "proposes to work only by penal enforcements, making their appeal to self-interested motive, and that only" (p. 109). And this is said of a law that appeals to reason and conscience and every innate sentiment of right and honor in man! He says, again, that the law "works for the most part, and must, by negative statutes, that forbid, and not by positive, that command." Whereas, according to our Saviour, the whole spirit and intent of the law is summed up in the two positive commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and "'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" Dr. Bushnell furthermore says of the law, that "it brings no inspirations, and yokes its subjects to God by no faith climbing into the sense of his friendship." No inspirations for a good man in a law that embodies the idea of absolute right, and also the will of a perfect God! Did David find no inspirations in it when he wrote the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm? Did the heroes of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews find no inspirations in it? Do holy angels find no inspirations in it? There is no need to decry the law, in order to exalt the gospel. The law is "holy, just, and good." The trouble is, that men are so sinful that, with all its inspirations and appeals to their reason, love, hope, and fear, they will not obey it — will not obey it perfectly, even with all the new inspirational motivity furnished by the gospel.

The great object of this chapter is to show that "the law, broken by sin, is sufficiently consecrated by Christ, incarnated into and co-operating with it, in his life and cross; and that it is satisfied or fulfilled by the obedience rendered by those who become his disciples. With much that is true and eloquent in this discussion, there is not a little which seems fanciful and illogical.

We are surprised to see that Dr. Bushnell still misconceives and misrepresents the New England, or "governmental theory" of the atonement. He may characterize it, if he choose, as a "most sorry theologic invention"; but surely he ought better to understand it before caricaturing it as he does on page 145.

We regret that he should have gone out of his way to give even a footnote indorsement of the doctrine of the annihilation of the wicked, "at some remote period" (p. 147).

In the third chapter, entitled, Justification by Faith, we have a restate-

ment of the same defective views of justification found in *The Vicarious Sacrifice*. Dr. Bushnell is unquestionably right in emphasizing the moral element in justification, but wrong in wholly excluding the judicial element.

The fourth chapter, entitled, *Threefold Doctrine of Christ concerning Himself*, contains matter only remotely related to the main subject of the volume. It is really a separate discourse, founded on John xvi. 7-15. Dr. Bushnell, with "a little harmless egotism," claims to be the first man to set forth the true meaning of this passage; all the great interpreters for eighteen hundred years having, "by some unaccountable dulness, missed" it. He thinks that Christ, in announcing the advent of the Paraclete, as one "who will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment," gives a brief summation of what he has done for the world — the results of his life and death, which will be "the doctrinal outfit" of the Spirit who is to take his place, and through whom he is still to carry on his gracious work for mankind. We do not quite see how a simple declaration of what the Spirit will do is a statement of what Christ has done. Undoubtedly Christ, before his death, to some extent, did just these three things which he says the Spirit will do after his death; but it does not follow that the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit are in all respects the same; or, if you please, that the work which Christ accomplished in his own person in the flesh was in all respects the same as that which he accomplishes in the person of the Spirit. One part of redemption was finished on the cross, which we believe was something more than "reproving the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come." It is probably owing to some "unaccountable dulness" that we cannot quite accept the interpretation here given of this passage as the "threefold doctrine of Christ concerning himself."

Has Dr. Bushnell exactly hit the meaning of *Παράκλητος*? Is not the last part of the word — *κλητος* — passive, instead of active? And is not the Spirit thus designated as One "called near," rather than as a "Near Caller"?

If, in our notice of this volume, we have fallen into a strain of adverse criticism, it is not because we do not appreciate its many excellences, nor admire the genius and character of its distinguished author; but because we believe that it presents a one-sided and very inadequate treatment of the great central doctrine of the gospel. We trust that Dr. Bushnell's contributions to our religious literature are not ended, that a life so consecrated to earnest thought and earnest utterance may long be spared to the world, and that among the fruits it is yet to yield will be a revision of this revision, made necessary by the "unexpected arrival of fresh light"; for we are persuaded that there is still occasion for him, as well as for others, to repeat the opening sentences of the prayer with which *The Vicarious Sacrifice* concludes: "O thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, into what strange places, and how far away, hath our foolish

conceit been leading us. We thought we must needs make out for thy dear Son—dear, also, to us, because he hath come to bring us life—some wisely-framed doctrine, bearing the stamp of our own wise thought and science, not so familiar and so merely practical as thy choice words of sacrifice. But we have wearied ourselves in the greatness of our way. We have raised long controversies and held learned councils and contrived exact articles; and, though we have seemed to settle many things wisely, yet nothing is either settled or wise; but whatever we devise turns dry, looks empty, disappoints the craving of our wants, creating, after all, only such consent as consists in a common discord.”

ARTICLE XI.

NOTES ON EGYPTOLOGY.—NEW THEORY OF THE EXODUS BY PASHA BRUGSCH.

BY JOSEPH P. THOMPSON, D.D., LL.D., BERLIN.

BELIEVERS in the divine authority of the Hebrew scriptures should not be over eager in accepting the seeming confirmations of their story which from time to time are brought forward from Assyrian and Egyptian monuments, and from other collateral sources. Such confirmations undoubtedly exist, and in the progress of archaeological research we may confidently look for more. They are valuable chiefly as side-lights, illuminating certain incidental points in the biblical narrative, and by throwing these into clearer relief, giving an extraneous confirmation to the whole story with which these stand connected; but they should never be magnified as the central light of the story itself, the conclusive evidence of its authenticity. The trepidation of some biblical critics at the alleged antiquity of the zodiac of Denderah, and their subsequent exultation over its comparatively modern data and significance, were alike unseemly, and betrayed an undue sensitiveness to the value of such testimony upon either side. That the Pentateuch is steeped in the atmosphere of Egypt and of the desert, that its narratives breathe the air of Oriental life, and its laws and customs reflect, now the stable civilization of Egyptian society, and now the rude freedom and simplicity of the wilderness, are strong internal proofs of the historical truth of the

¹ *La Sortie des Hébreux d'Égypte et les Monuments Égyptiens Conférence par Henri Brugsch-Bey, Vice-Président des Écoles Libres, Gratuites et Universelles de la Ville du Caire. Publiée sous les Auspices de S. A. le Prince Ibrahim-Pacha. 8vo. pp. 47. Alexandrie: A. Mourès. 1874.*