

REDEMPTION

Accomplished and Applied

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JOHN MURRAY

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Foreword to the 2015 Edition

As a new convert to Christianity in the mid-1980s, I was always trying to find books that would help me engage more deeply with the faith. Because I had not grown up in a Christian home and had almost never attended church, my knowledge of the Bible and of its teaching was minimal. I knew something about God, something about sin, and something about Christ. Beyond that, I was a Cambridge undergraduate with less theological understanding than a ten-year-old who had been taught the catechism.

Because of this, I was always hunting for good, basic books on Christian doctrine. A kind local pastor gave me a copy of J. I. Packer's *God's Words* and that helped introduce me to the basic elements of evangelical theology. Then someone recommended I obtain a copy of John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. I had never heard of Murray and neither had the manager of the local Christian bookshop, but he dutifully ordered me a copy. When it arrived, I confess to a little disappointment. Frankly, I had expected a weightier tome, not a relatively brief paperback. Yet my disappointment did not survive even my reading of the very first chapter.

What Murray did, and what I had never really seen before, was demonstrate how my salvation connected to the work of God in both eternity, as he planned salvation, and

time, as he executed it in the person and work of his Son and applied it to individuals through the work of his Holy Spirit. Thus, Murray's little book did three things of major importance: it showed how eternity and time relate to each other in salvation, how that salvation is a Trinitarian matter, rooted in the very identity of God as Trinity, and how this makes sense of the whole Bible.

Of course, Murray was not really doing anything exceptional. What he did was build upon a rich tradition of thinking in the Reformed churches, which placed each of these three points in the foundation of their testimony. As a minister in my own denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and as a key faculty member in the early days of Westminster Theological Seminary, Murray loved the Westminster Standards and the theology which they teach. What he sought to do was to explicate that theology, particularly as it relates to salvation.

More specifically, Murray was seeking to articulate the *order of salvation* (Latin: *ordo salutis*) in a manner that also connected it to the *history of salvation* (Latin: *historia salutis*). We might distinguish the two by saying that the order of salvation pertains to the way in which the individual appropriates salvation. Election, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification are the basic elements of this. The history of salvation is focused on the acts of God in history, specifically as they culminate in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which provide the basis for the order of salvation.

Thus the work begins with a careful analysis of the nature of the atonement. This is history of salvation territory. Christ's incarnation and death must be understood against the backdrop of God's love in eternity for those he has chosen to rescue from their sin and its eternal consequences. Then the cross itself must be understood in terms of God's wrath against sin, of his imputation of our sin to Christ, and

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of the Old Testament sacrificial system of which it is the fulfillment. Murray's view is profoundly particularist, whereby Christ's death is not for everyone but for those whom God has chosen.

Then, in the second half of the work, Murray looks at the implications of Christ's death for the salvation of the individual believer, addressing the various elements of the order of salvation. What emerges is a seamless move from eternity to time, and from the work of God in Christ to the work of God in the believer.

Murray's book has its critics. His view of particular redemption is repudiated by those opposed to what they call "limited atonement," who see it as restricting God's love and standing at odds with passages in the New Testament which apparently speak of the universality of God's desire for all to be saved. Others within the Reformed camp itself have taken issue with Murray, or at least with certain traditions of reading Murray, for what they see as a failure to distinguish clearly between justification and sanctification.

I make no comment on those debates here. The book you have in your hand is a miniature masterpiece of theology, dealing reverently on every page with matters of great theological significance. Whether you end the book by agreeing or disagreeing with its author, you will have found your own thinking on these issues sharpened and clarified.

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Preface to the First Edition

The accomplishment of redemption or, as it has frequently been called, the atonement, is central in our Christian faith. It is no wonder therefore that the Christian church should have in its possession a rich repertory of literature on this subject. It is with some misgiving that I have ventured to offer for publication the following attempt to deal with an aspect of the divine revelation that has been explored to such an extent. This present study cannot pretend to be in the same class as many of the superb contributions of both the more remote and the more recent past. I can only claim that I am presenting what has passed through the crucible of my own reflection. I am conscious of the profound debt I owe to numberless theologians and expositors. Acknowledgment in details would be impossible. Other men have labored and we have entered into their labors. However, there are certain facets of this great truth which I have sought to bring into clearer focus. Perhaps some neglected factors have received an emphasis which our present-day theological situation demands.

On so great a theme as Christ's redemptive accomplishment I am profoundly conscious of the limitations that encompass our attempts at exposition. Thought and expression stagger in the presence of the spectacle that confronts us in

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the vicarious sin-bearing of the Lord of glory. Here we must realize that we are dealing with the mystery of godliness, and eternity will not reach the bottom of it nor exhaust its praise. Yet it is ours to proclaim it and continue the attempt to expound and defend its truth.

The material in Part II of this volume, dealing with the application of redemption, was written for *The Presbyterian Guardian* at the request of the editor, the Rev. Leslie W. Sloat, and was published in twenty-two articles from October 1952 to August 1954. I wish to express my indebtedness to *The Presbyterian Guardian* and to Mr. Sloat in particular for the courtesy of publication and for permission to reprint these articles in the present form. Any difference there may be in the mode of treatment between Part I and Part II of this volume is explained by the original purpose of what is comprised in the latter.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Miss Margaret S. Robinson for her services in preparing the typescript and to Miss T. E. N. Ozinga for preparing the indexes. Above all, I must thank the publishers, the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, for undertaking this publication and for the many courtesies bestowed upon me in negotiations to that end.

I can only hope that the reader will find these studies consonant with the witness of Holy Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and that by God's grace what is accordant with Scripture will elicit the response of faith and conviction.

Philadelphia
May 24, 1955

JOHN MURRAY

PART I

Redemption Accomplished

CHAPTER I

The Necessity of the Atonement

The accomplishment of redemption is concerned with what has been generally called the atonement. No treatment of the atonement can be properly oriented that does not trace its source to the free and sovereign love of God. It is with this perspective that the best known text in the Bible provides us: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Here we have an ultimate of divine revelation and therefore of human thought. Beyond this we cannot and dare not go.

That it is an ultimate of human thought does not exclude, however, any further characterization of this love of God. The Scripture informs us that this love of God from which the atonement flows and of which it is the expression is a love that is distinguishing. No one gloried in this love of God more than the apostle Paul. "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32). But it is the same apostle who delineates for us the eternal counsel of God which supplies the background of such protestation and which defines

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for us the orbit within which such statements have meaning and validity. He writes: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). And elsewhere he becomes perhaps even more explicit when he says: "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him; in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5). The love of God from which the atonement springs is not a distinctionless love; it is a love that elects and predestinates. God was pleased to set his invincible and everlasting love upon a countless multitude and it is the determinate purpose of this love that the atonement secures.

It is necessary to underline this concept of sovereign love. Truly God is love. Love is not something adventitious; it is not something that God may choose to be or choose not to be. He is love, and that necessarily, inherently, and eternally. As God is spirit, as he is light, so he is love. Yet it belongs to the very essence of electing love to recognize that it is not inherently necessary to that love which God necessarily and eternally is that he should set such love as issues in redemption and adoption upon utterly undesirable and hell-deserving objects. It was of the free and sovereign good pleasure of his will, a good pleasure that emanated from the depths of his own goodness, that he chose a people to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The reason resides wholly in himself and proceeds from determinations that are peculiarly his as the "I am that I am." The atonement does not win or constrain the love of God. The love of God constrains to the atonement as the means of accomplishing love's determinate purpose.¹

1. Cf. Hugh Martin: *The Atonement: in its Relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord* (Edinburgh, 1887), p. 19.

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It must be regarded, therefore, as a settled datum that the love of God is the cause or source of the atonement. But this does not answer the question as to the *reason* or *necessity*. What is the *reason* why the love of God should take such a way of realizing its end and fulfilling its purpose? Why, we are compelled to ask, the sacrifice of the Son of God, why the blood of the Lord of glory? “For what necessity and for what reason,” asked Anselm of Canterbury, “did God, since he is omnipotent, take upon himself the humiliation and weakness of human nature in order to its restoration.”² Why did not God realize the purpose of his love for mankind by the word of his power and the fiat of his will? If we say that he could not, do we not impugn his power? If we say that he could but would not, do we not impugn his wisdom? Such questions are not scholastic subtleties or vain curiosities. To evade them is to miss something that is central in the interpretation of the redeeming work of Christ and to miss the vision of some of its essential glory. Why did God become man? Why, having become man, did he die? Why, having died, did he die the accursed death of the cross? This is the question of the *necessity* of the atonement.

Among the answers given to this question, two are most important. They are, first, the view known as that of hypothetical necessity and, second, the view which we may call that of consequent absolute necessity. The former was held by such notable men as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.³ The latter may be regarded as the more classic protestant position.

The view known as that of hypothetical necessity main-

2. *Cur. Deus Homo*, Lib. I, Cap. I: “qua necessitate scilicet et ratione deus, cum sit omnipotens, humilitatem et infirmitatem humanae naturae pro eius restauratione assumpserit.”

3. Cf. Augustine: *On the Trinity*, Bk. XIII, Chap. 10; Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, Part III, Q. 46, Arts 2 and 3.

tains that God could have forgiven sin and saved his elect without atonement or satisfaction — other means were open to God to whom all things are possible. But the way of the vicarious sacrifice of the Son of God was the way which God in his grace and sovereign wisdom chose because this is the way in which the greatest number of advantages concur and the way in which grace is more marvellously exhibited. So, while God *could* save without an atonement, yet, in accordance with his sovereign decree, he actually does not. Without shedding of blood there is actually no remission or salvation. Yet nothing inheres in the nature of God or in the nature of remission of sin that makes blood-shedding indispensable.

The other view we call consequent absolute necessity. The word “consequent” in this designation points to the fact that God’s will or decree to save any is of free and sovereign grace. To save lost men was not of absolute necessity but of the sovereign good pleasure of God. The terms “absolute necessity,” however, indicate that God, having elected some to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure, was under the necessity of accomplishing this purpose through the sacrifice of his own Son, a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature. In a word, while it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only through substitutionary sacrifice and blood-bought redemption.⁴

It might appear to be vainly speculative and presumptuous to press such an inquiry and to try to determine what is inherently necessary for God. Furthermore, it might appear

4. Cf. Francis Turretin: *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, Loc. XIV, Q. X; James Henley Thornwell: “The Necessity of the Atonement” in *Collected Writings*, Vol. II (Richmond, 1886), pp. 205-261; George Stevenson: *A Dissertation on the Atonement* (Philadelphia, 1832), pp. 5-98; A. A. Hodge: *The Atonement* (London, 1868), pp. 217-222.

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to lie on the face of such a text as, “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” that the extent of revelation to us is simply that there is *de facto* no remission without blood-shedding and that it would be beyond the warrant of Scripture for us to say what is *de jure* indispensable for God.

But it is not presumptuous for us to say that certain things are inherently necessary or impossible for God. It belongs to our faith in God to avow that he cannot lie and that he cannot deny himself. Such divine “cannots” are his glory and for us to refrain from reckoning with such “impossibles” would be to deny God’s glory and perfection.

The question really is: does the Scripture provide us with evidence or considerations on the basis of which we may conclude that this is one of the things impossible or necessary for God, impossible for him to save sinners without vicarious sacrifice and inherently necessary, therefore, that salvation freely and sovereignly determined, should be accomplished by the blood-shedding of the Lord of glory. The following Scriptural considerations appear to require an affirmative answer. In adducing these considerations it must be remembered that they are to be viewed in co-ordination and in their cumulative effect.

I. There are those passages which create a very strong presumption in favor of this inference. In Hebrews 2:10, 17, for example, it is estimated that it was divinely appropriate that the Father in bringing many sons unto glory should make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings and that it behooved the Savior himself to be made in all things like unto his brethren. The force of such expressions is scarcely satisfied by the notion that it was merely consonant with the wisdom and love of God to accomplish salvation in this way. This is true, of course, and is maintained on the view known as that of hypothetical necessity. But more appears to be said in this passage. The case appears to be rather that

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such were the exigencies of the purpose of grace that the dictates of divine propriety required that salvation should be accomplished through a captain of salvation who would be made perfect through sufferings and that this entailed for the captain of salvation that he be made in all things like unto his brethren. In other words, we are carried beyond the thought of consonance with the divine character to the thought of divine properties which made it requisite that the many sons should be brought to glory in this particular way. If this is the case, then we are led to the thought that exigencies of divine import are met by the sufferings of the captain of salvation.

2. There are passages, such as John 3:14-16, which rather definitely suggest that the alternative to the giving of God's only-begotten Son and his being lifted up on the accursed tree is the eternal perdition of the lost. The eternal peril to which the lost are exposed is remedied by the giving of the Son. But we can hardly escape the additional thought that there is no other alternative.

3. Such passages as Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:9-18; 9:9-14, 22-28 teach very plainly that the efficacy of Christ's work is contingent upon the unique constitution of Christ's person. This fact does not of itself establish the point in question. But contextual considerations reveal further implications. The emphasis in these passages rests upon the finality, perfection, and transcendent efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. Such finality, perfection, and efficacy are necessitated by the gravity of sin, and sin must be effectively removed if salvation is to be realized. It is this consideration that gives such strength to the necessity, spoken of in 9:23, to the effect that while the patterns of things in the heavenlies should be purified with the blood of goats and calves, the heavenly things themselves should be purified by the blood of none other than the Son. In other words, there is stated to be a necessity that can be met by nothing less than the blood of Jesus. But the blood of

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Jesus is blood that has the requisite efficacy and virtue only by reason of the fact that he who is the Son, the effulgence of the Father's glory and the express image of his substance, became himself also partaker of flesh and blood and thus was able by one sacrifice to perfect all those who are sanctified. It is surely not an unwarranted inference to conclude that the thought here presented is that only such a person, offering such a sacrifice, could have dealt with sin so as to remove it and could have made such purification as would secure for the many sons to be brought to glory access into the very holiest of the divine presence. And this is but saying that the blood-shedding of Jesus was necessary to the ends contemplated and secured.

There are other considerations, also, which may be derived from these passages, especially Hebrews 9:9-14, 22-28. They are the considerations which arise from the fact that Christ's own sacrifice is the great exemplar after which the Levitical sacrifices were patterned. We often think of the Levitical sacrifices as providing the pattern for the sacrifice of Christ. This direction of thought is not improper — the Levitical sacrifices do furnish us with the categories in terms of which we are to interpret the sacrifice of Christ, particularly the categories of expiation, propitiation, and reconciliation. But this line of thought is not the characteristic one in Hebrews 9. The thought is specifically that the Levitical sacrifices were patterned after the heavenly exemplar — they were “patterns of the things in the heavens” (Heb. 9:23). Hence the necessity for the blood offerings of the Levitical economy arose from the fact that the exemplar after which they were fashioned was a blood offering, the transcendent blood offering by which the heavenly things were purified. The necessity of blood-shedding in the Levitical ordinance is simply a necessity arising from the necessity of blood-shedding in the higher realm of the heavenly. Now our question

is: what kind of necessity is this that obtained in the realm of the heavenly? Was it merely hypothetical or was it absolute? The following observations will indicate the answer.

(a) The emphasis of the context is that the transcendent efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is required by the exigencies arising from sin. And these exigencies are not hypothetical — they are absolute. The logic of this emphasis upon the intrinsic gravity of sin and the necessity of its removal does not comport with the idea of hypothetical necessity — the reality and gravity of sin make effective expiation indispensable, and that is to say absolutely necessary.

(b) The precise nature of Christ's priestly offering and the efficacy of his sacrifice are bound up with the constitution of his person. If there was the necessity for such a sacrifice in order to remove sin, none other but he could offer such a sacrifice. And this amounts to the necessity of such a person offering such a sacrifice.

(c) In this passage the heavenly things in connection with which Christ's blood was shed are called *true*. The contrast implied is not true as opposed to false or real as opposed to fictitious. It is the heavenly as contrasted with the earthly, the eternal with the temporary, the complete with the partial, the final with the provisional, the abiding with that which passes away. When we think of the sacrifice of Christ as offered in connection with things answering to that characterization — heavenly, eternal, complete, final, abiding, is it not impossible to think of this sacrifice as only hypothetically necessary in the accomplishment of God's design of bringing many sons to glory? If the sacrifice of Christ is only hypothetically necessary, then the heavenly things in connection with which it had relevance and meaning were also only hypothetically necessary. And that is surely a difficult hypothesis.

The sum of the matter is that a necessity (Heb. 9:23) for the blood-shedding of Christ unto the remission of sins

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(vers. 14, 22, 26) is here propounded and it is a necessity without reservation or qualification.

4. The salvation which the election of grace involves on either view of the necessity of the atonement is salvation from sin unto holiness and fellowship with God. But if we are to think of salvation thus conceived in terms that are compatible with the holiness and righteousness of God, this salvation must embrace not merely the forgiveness of sin but also justification. And it must be a justification that takes account of our situation as condemned and guilty. Such a justification implies the necessity of a righteousness that will be adequate to our situation. Grace indeed reigns but a grace reigning apart from righteousness is not only not actual; it is inconceivable. Now, what righteousness is equal to the justification of sinners? The only righteousness conceivable that will meet the requirements of our situation as sinners and meet the requirements of a full and irrevocable justification is the righteousness of Christ. This implies his obedience and therefore his incarnation, death, and resurrection. In a word, the necessity of the atonement is inherent in and essential to justification. A salvation from sin divorced from justification is an impossibility and justification of sinners without the God-righteousness of the Redeemer is unthinkable. We can hardly escape the relevance of Paul's word: "For if a law had been given which could make alive, verily righteousness would have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21). What Paul is insisting upon is that if justification could have been secured by any other method than that of faith in Christ, by that method it would have been.

5. The cross of Christ is the supreme demonstration of the love of God (Rom. 5:8; I John 4:10). The supreme character of the demonstration resides in the extreme costliness of the sacrifice rendered. It is this costliness that Paul has in view when he writes: "He that spared not his own Son, but deliv-

ered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). The costliness of the sacrifice assures us of the greatness of the love and guarantees the bestowal of all other free gifts.

We must ask, however: would the cross of Christ be a supreme exhibition of love if there were no necessity for such costliness? Is it not so that the only inference on the basis of which the cross of Christ can be commended to us as the supreme exhibition of divine love is that the exigencies provided for required nothing less than the sacrifice of the Son of God? On that assumption we can understand John's utterance, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Without it we are bereft of the elements necessary to make intelligible to us the meaning of Calvary and the marvel of its supreme love to us men.

6. Finally, there is the argument from the vindictory justice of God. Sin is the contradiction of God and he must react against it with holy indignation. This is to say that sin must meet with divine judgment (cf. Deut. 27:26; Nah. 1:2; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 1:17; 3:21-26; Gal. 3:10, 13). It is this inviolable sanctity of God's law, the immutable dictate of holiness and the unflinching demand of justice, that makes mandatory the conclusion that salvation from sin without expiation and propitiation is inconceivable. It is this principle that explains the sacrifice of the Lord of glory, the agony of Gethsemane, and the abandonment of the accursed tree. It is this principle that undergirds the great truth that God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. For in the work of Christ the dictates of holiness and the demands of justice have been fully vindicated. God set him forth to be a propitiation to declare his righteousness.

For these reasons we are constrained to conclude that the kind of necessity which the Scriptural considerations

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support is that which may be described as absolute or indispensable. The proponents of hypothetical necessity do not reckon sufficiently with the exigencies involved in salvation from sin unto eternal life; they do not take proper account of the Godward aspects of Christ's accomplishment. If we keep in view the gravity of sin and the exigencies arising from the holiness of God which must be met in salvation from it, then the doctrine of indispensable necessity makes Calvary intelligible to us and enhances the incomprehensible marvel of both Calvary itself and the sovereign purpose of love which Calvary fulfilled. The more we emphasize the inflexible demands of justice and holiness the more marvelous become the love of God and its provisions.