

**A TREATISE ON ATONEMENT; IN WHICH THE
FINITE NATURE OF SIN IS ARGUED, ITS CAUSE
AND CONSEQUENCES AS SUCH; THE
NECESSITY AND NATURE OF ATONEMENT;
AND ITS GLORIOUS CONSEQUENCES, IN THE
FINAL RECONCILIATION OF ALL MEN TO
HOLINESS AND HAPPINESS**

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BY

HOSEA BALLOU,

AUTHOR OF "NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE PARABLES,"
"CANDID REVIEW," &c.

"For, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—St. Paul.

"And there shall be no more death."—St. John.

SIXTH EDITION.



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A LETTER TO THE READER

Christian Reader,

I know it is frequently the case, when a person takes a new work in hand, he first casts his eye over the title page, and if he find no word on it that indicates perverse sentiments; and the name or denomination of the author be agreeable, he may think of having patience to read it; but, being something in a hurry, passes slightly over the preface, supposing it to be of little consequence. But what sensations may have struck your mind, on reading the title of this book, and finding it to be the intention of the author to prove the doctrine of *universal holiness* and *happiness*, through the mediation and power of atoning grace, I cannot say; however, I would invite you to read, with candor and attention, not only this letter, but the whole of the work, and make up your judgement afterwards.

Many circumstances might be mentioned, which, in their association, have induced me to write and publish the following treatise; but I can say, with propriety, that the central object was that, in which I always find the most happiness, viz. to do what I find most necessary, in order to render myself most useful to mankind.

I have, from my early youth, been much in the habit of inquiring into the things of religion, and religious sentiments; and have, for a number of years, seen or thought I saw, great inconsistencies, in what has, for a long time, passed for orthodoxy in divinity.

The ideas, that sin is infinite, and that it deserves an infinite punishment; that the law transgressed is infinite, and inflicts an infinite penalty; and that the great Jehovah took on himself a natural body of flesh and blood, and actually suffered death on a cross, to satisfy his infinite justice, and thereby save his creatures from endless misery, are ideas which appear to me to be unfounded in the nature of reason, and unsupported by divine revelation. Such notions have, in my opinion, served to darken the human understanding and obscure the gospel of eternal life; and have rendered, what I esteem as divine revelation, a subject of discredit to thousands, who, I believe, would never have condemned the scriptures, had it not been for those gross absurdities being contended for, and the scriptures forced to bend to such significations. Christian authors and preachers have labored much to dissuade those whom they have caused to disbelieve the Christian religion, from their infidelity. But, in this case, the *self* has lost its savor, become good for nothing, and is trodden

under foot of men, who are *too sensible* to believe the unreasonable dogmas imposed on the world, either through error, or design, and sanctioned by tradition: and *too inattentive* to search the scriptures faithfully and impartially, whereby they might have learned that those errors were neither in them, nor supported by them. One particular object, therefore in this work, is, if possible, to free the scripture doctrine of atonement from those incumbrances which have done it so much injury; and open a door at least, for the subject to be investigated on reasonable grounds, and by fair argument.

If we admit that our Creator made us reasonable beings, we ought, of course, to believe, that all the truth which is necessary for our belief, is not only reasonable, but reducible to our understandings.

In order to come at the subject of atonement, so as to have light continually shining along the path which I intend to occupy, I found it necessary to show my reasons for not admitting the doctrine, on the ground on which it is usually argued: to do which, I found I must, of necessity, show, that the common notion of the *infinity* of sin is unfounded in truth; and of course, every consequence deducible from such an error, equally unfounded and unsupported. It may seem not a little strange, to some of my readers, that I dispute the *infinity* of the law against which sin is committed; as all unholiness must be, either in union or disunion, with the eternal law of holiness and divine purity. But if the reader will take a little pains to observe particularly, it will appear plain, that no being can stand amenable to a law above his capacity. And as the creature is *finite*, in his earthly character, in which character only, he is, or can be a sinner, it is not reasonable to say, that he stands amenable to an infinite law. Or if the law be infinite, the accountability, in a moral sense, can extend no farther than his knowledge of this law extends. But, as the reader will find, in this work so much of the divine law of perfection, as the creature obtains a knowledge of, (which, in comparison to the whole, is no more than a shadow to a substance) is the law which he violates by his sin. And though we may speak of the sin of ignorance, it can amount to no more than the production of a virtuous intention thwarted by ignorance, or the same principle by which the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea, gratify their various inclinations and appetites. And I do not think my reader will wish to have me prove that such sin is not infinite.

In my argument on the cause, or origin of sin, I thought it necessary to hint a little on the general idea of the subject, endeavoring to show the want of propriety in what is commonly contended for; and I have sought for the rise of unholy temptations in the constitutions of earthly and finite beings. I have endeavored, also to trace the causes and consequences

of sin (as sin) so as to determine the *finite* nature of *all* which belongs to sin as *cause* and *consequence*. In any sense, in which it can be said that God is the author of any thing whatever, in that sense of speaking, it cannot be sin. And in any sense, in which any action, or event, can be said to be endless, in its consequences, God must be considered the author of it.

In all the statements which I have made of the doctrinal ideas of others, I have been careful to state no more than what I have read in authors, or heard contended for in preaching, or conversation; and if I have, in any instance, done those ideas any injustice, it was not intended. The reason why I have not quoted any author, or spoken of any denomination, is, I have not felt it to be my duty nor inclination, to write against any name, or denomination, in the world; but my object has been, what I pray it ever may be, to contend against error, wherever I find it; and to receive truth, and support it, let it come from what quarter it may. For the sake of ease, however, in writing, I reasoned with my *opponent, opposer, or objector* meaning no one in particular, but any one who uses the arguments, and states the objections, which I have endeavored to answer. It is very probable, that some may think me too ironical, and, in many instances, too severe, on what I call error. But I find it very difficult to expose error, so as to be understood by all, without carrying, in many instances, my arguments in such a form as may not be agreeable to those who believe in what I wish to correct. I confess I should have been glad to have written, on all my inquires, so as not to have displeased any, but to have pleased all, could I have done it, and accomplished my main design; but this I was persuaded would be difficult. I have, therefore paid particular attention to nothing but my main object; depending on the goodness of my reader to pardon what may be disagreeable, in manner or form, as in advertencies.

What I have written on the subject of the *Trinity*, is mainly to show the reader in what light I view the Mediator, that my general ideas of atonement may be the easier understood. And though I think my objections and arguments, against the common idea of three distinct persons in the Godhead, who are *equal in power and glory*, to be unanswerable; yet it was not my intention to attend to a full refutation of those ideas, as this was to have led too far from our main object.

The opposers of Universalism have generally written and contended against the doctrine, under an entire mistaken notion of it. They have endeavored to show the absurdity of believing that men could be received into the *kingdom of glory and righteousness, in their sins*; which *no universalist ever believed*. In this work, I have endeavored to make as fair a statement, of what I call Universalism, as I was able;

and it stands on such ground, that the propriety of 't can no more be disputed, than the propriety of *universal holiness* and *reconciliation to God*. Perhaps the reader will say, he has read a number of authors on the doctrine of Universalism, and finds considerable difference in their systems. That I acknowledge is true; but all agree in the main point, viz. that *universal holiness* and *happiness* is the great object of the *gospel plan*. And as for the different ways in which individuals may believe this work will be done, it proves nothing against the main point; but proves, what I wish could be proved concerning all other *Christian denominations*, that they have set up no standard of their own, to cause all to bow to, or be rejected as heretics. We feel our own imperfections; we wish for every one to seek with all his might after wisdom; and let it be found where it may, or by whom it may, we humbly wish to have it brought to light, that all may enjoy it; but do not feel authorized to condemn an honest inquirer after truth, for what he believes different from a majority of us.

A few sentences, which the reader will find towards the close of this work, which have reference to a punishment after death, may cause him to desire more of my ideas on the subject.

The doctrine of punishment after death, has, by many able writers, been contended for; some of whom have argued such punishment to be endless, and others limited. But it appears to me that they have taken wrong ground who have endeavored to support the latter, as well as those who have labored to prove the former. They have both put great dependence on certain figurative and parabolical expressions, or passages of scripture, which they explain, so as to cause them to allude to such an event. It appears to me, that they have not sufficiently attended to the nature of sin, so as to learn its punishment to be produced from a law of *necessity*, and not a law of *penalty*. Had they seen this, they would also have seen, that a perpetuity of punishment must be connected with an equal continuance of sin, on the same principle that an effect is dependent on its cause. Who in the world would contend, that a man, who had sinned one year, could expiate his guilt, by sinning five more, with greater turpitude of heart? State the punishment, say a thousand years, for a sinner who dies in unbelief. What is it for? Say for his incorrigibility in this world. Well, does he commit sin during these thousand years? Surely, or he could not be miserable. Then I ask, if it take a thousand years punishment in another world, to reward the sinner for, say fifty years of sin in this, how long must he be punished, afterwards, for the sin he commits during the thousand years? The punishment, or sufferings, which we endure, in consequence of sin, is not a dispensation of any *penal law*, but of the *law of necessity*, in which law, as long as a cause contin-

ues, it produces its effects. Therefore, to prove a man will suffer condemnation for sin, at thirty, forty, or fifty years of age, it would be necessary to prove that he would be a sinner at that time, or those times. So, in order to prove that a man will be miserable, after this mortal life is ended, it must first be proved that he will sin in the next state of existence.

It has been argued, by many, that the doctrine of future punishment, or misery, is a necessary doctrine to dissuade men from committing sin, which surely surprises me. To tell a person who is in *love of sin*, that if he does not immediately refrain, he will have to *continue in sin for a long time*, would be true, *de jure*; but would be void of force to dissuade him from what he is in *love with*. I believe, that as long as men sin, they will be miserable, be that time longer or shorter; and that as soon as they cease from sin, they begin to experience divine enjoyment.

The scripture speaks of the *times of the restitution of all things*, but does not inform us their number, or their duration. It also speaks of the *fullness of times*, but gives us no date, or duration of them.

I have not stated so many objections against the doctrine which I have labored to prove, as many of my readers may wish I had, nor so many as I should have been glad to, was it not for swelling the work to more of an expensive size. But I have stated, and endeavored to answer the most frequent objections, and those on which my opposers put the most dependence; and I should have taken great satisfaction in communicating many more arguments, both from reason and scripture, in favor of universal holiness and happiness, than I have, was it not for the reason assigned in the other case. However, if those objections which I have taken notice of, are answered to the reader's satisfaction, other scriptures, generally used as argument against the salvation of all men, will not be hard to be understood, as not unfavorable to the doctrine. And as for the proofs which I have deduced from scripture and reason, I believe them entirely conclusive; but if not, more of the same kind would not be.

The reason I have not particularly explained those parables of the New Testament which I have had occasion to notice, in this work, is, my Notes, of which, mention is made on the title page of this book, are before the public, and contain my ideas on most of the parables spoken by Christ.

A question may be asked by many, which has labored much in my mind, respecting the propriety of publishing books on divinity, when we profess to believe in the book called the *Bible*, that it contains all which we mean to communicate as truth, in matters of religion; on which question I am determined for myself, that the gospel of Jesus Christ would have been better understood, had the bible been the only book ever read on the subject. And though I doubt not but many authors have done great justice to those sub