

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 22. Its Proclamation

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Transcript

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We have now arrived at what is, from some standpoints, the most difficult aspect of our subject. Exactly what is it which the servant of God ought to preach? Or, more specifically, what constitutes the main item in his message to the unsaved, and in what is he to instruct the saints? To many it appears that he who clearly apprehends the limitation of God's love to His elect, and the satisfaction of Christ being made for them only, is to be fettered in the preaching of the Gospel; yea, not a few suppose that if a preacher really believes such doctrines as these, he will have no message at all for the unsaved. But such is far from being the case: those who draw such conclusions err grievously. No honest mind can ponder the epistles of Paul without seeing that he believed firmly in the sovereign love and discriminating grace of God, and the restricted design of the atonement; yet none can read through the Acts without discovering that the same Paul was a most zealous evangelist and preached a Gospel which was as free as the air we breathe. That Christ died only for those who shall be infallibly saved, is a doctrine which seems to have an adverse bearing 'towards the world at large, and to embarrass the free proclamation of the Gospel. A feeling arises that there is something very much like an inconsistency or incompatibility between the restricted design and efficacy of the Great Propitiation to a predetermined and limited number of the race, and the commission which Christ has given to His servants. In seeking to grapple with this difficulty, let us begin by inquiring, Is an unlimited atonement necessary in order to warrant ministers of the Gospel tendering Divine pardon to all men without exception, and inviting and exhorting them to come to Christ? In seeking answer to this question, it should be evident that our conduct in preaching the Gospel and addressing our fellowmen with a view to their salvation, should not be regulated by any inferences of our own from the nature and extent of the provision actually made for saving them, but is to be governed solely by the instructions which God has given. It is not for us to reason and argue, but to obey. The commission which Christ has given to His servants is too plain to be misunderstood. They are commanded to "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). They are required to proclaim to their fellow-men, of whatever character, and in all variety of circumstances, glad tidings of great joy. They are bidden to preach "repentance and remission of sins" in His name "among all nations" (Luke 24:47). They are enjoined to say, "All things are ready, come unto the marriage," and to go forth into the very highways, and as many as they shall find "bid to the marriage" (Matthew 22:4,9). They are to invite men to come to Christ, and beseech their hearers to be "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). They are to freely announce that, "The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16),

and that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Nothing could be clearer than this, and no philosophical reasonings or theological sophistries must be allowed to negative their marching-orders. God's revealed will is our only rule to walk by, and must ever be held as sufficient warrant for all that we do. In seeking to know our duty as to whom we should preach and as to what we are to say unto our fellow-men, Holy Writ is to be our sole guide and authority. Denominational customs, creedal prejudices, the example of eminent preachers, are no criterion at all. "To the Law and to the Testimony" (Isa. 8:20), must be our one and only recourse. Our business is to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2), leaving God to apply it according to His eternal purpose. We are to "sow beside all waters" (Isa. 32:20). Thus our duty is clearly defined. Like the Sower in the parable (Matthew 13), we are to scatter the Seed on the stony as well as on the good ground. The servants of God are to "preach the Gospel" (Mark 16:15), which is a proclamation of mercy through Christ. The Gospel is a Divine revelation of the way of salvation by free grace through the Lord Jesus. It announces deliverance from condemnation and the bestowment of eternal life upon all who comply with its terms. The Gospel presents not a system of philosophy, but the person of the God-man as the Object of faith. It makes known how the thrice holy God may be just and yet the Justifier of lawbreaking sinners. The things of our eternal concernment are therein proposed to us. A compliance with this Divine revelation is made of "repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Remission of sins is freely promised to all who thus comply with it. But it also implies and denounces tidings of the very opposite nature to all who neglect it: "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16); "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel" (2 Thess. 1:7, 8). Now in preaching the Gospel to a single individual (which is, usually, more difficult than preaching to a crowd) it is in nowise necessary to say to him, Christ died for you, He bore your sins on the Cross. Neither the Lord Jesus nor the apostles adopted such a mode of procedure. Take one pertinent illustration from each of them. In His discourse to Nicodemus, Christ did not say, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so shall the Son of man be lifted up for you, "but" even so shall the Son of man be lifted up that whosoever believeth in him should not perish" (John 3:14), thus pressing the responsibility of His hearer. So too when the Philippian jailer cried, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," but he did not add "who died for you." It is not until after we have truly believed, that we learn we are among that favored company for whom the incarnate Son shed His precious blood. The Gospel declares that "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6), and that the most ungodly wretch there is out of Hell who repents and believes shall be saved. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), yea, even the "chief" of sinners. That great fact supplies a warrant to preach the Gospel unto all men, but it is only as the individual sinner believes on Christ it becomes known that Christ died for him. Thus, to preach the Gospel to every creature and call on them to believe and be saved, is quite consistent, for it is a Divinely-revealed truth that "whosoever believeth" shall be saved! Any man who experiences a difficulty in freely preaching the Gospel because he cannot announce that Christ died for every individual of the human race, does not clearly understand what the "Gospel" is. The Gospel message is that Christ died for the most guilty who repent and believe. Nor is God guilty of the slightest deception in sending forth His servants to tender salvation to all sinners on the terms that they repent and believe, for He is true to His Word. He does save every sinner who complies with His terms; nor does He withhold His Spirit from any who truly desire Him to work in them a saving repentance and faith. The ground on which a sinner is bidden to believe unto the saving of his soul is neither God's decree of election, nor that Christ died for him in particular, but the plain declaration of the Gospel itself, namely, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). It cannot be said too emphatically that the only warrant for personal faith in Christ

which any man has, is that which the indiscriminate commands, invitations and promises of the Gospel hold forth. If we were assured of the absolute universality of redemption, or if we were permitted to read every name recorded in the Lamb's book of life, the case would be no plainer and more certain than it now is. The One who "cannot lie" most solemnly declares that "whosoever believeth" in His Son shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Christ Himself expressly announces, "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Any other warrant than this would be entirely inconsistent with the nature of faith: to demand it is sheer rebellion. Neither God's sovereign foreordination of an elect company unto salvation, nor the limitation of Christ's atonement to that company, in anywise alters the fact or militates against the truth of the indiscriminate tender of pardon which is made by and through the Gospel. It is every man's duty to "repent and believe the Gospel." It is God's gracious purpose to receive and save all who do thus repent and believe. The proclamation which God is making through the Gospel is real and sincere. The reason why so many do not benefit from that proclamation and avail themselves of its proffered mercy, is their own willful refusal of it. The door of Divine mercy stands wide open: over its portals stands written "whosoever will may come." If those invited insist upon making "excuse" then their blood is upon their own heads. Their very refusal to come to Christ that they "might have life" (John 5:40) only makes manifest the inveteracy of their sin, and will yet most fully justify the righteous judgment of God in the day to come — Psalm 51:4; Matthew 22:12; Romans 3:19. "An indiscriminate offer of an interest in the Atonement has been made for two thousand years since Christ died. But remember that the same indiscriminate offer was made for four thousand years before He died! The offer then was that if men would 'believe' upon a Christ to be sacrificed hereafter they should be saved. Now, is it sense or nonsense to believe that at the end of those four thousand years Christ died for the purpose of saving those who had already rejected Him, and who had consequently gone to their own place? Would it not have met the precise case of all who lived on earth before His advent if He had promised them that at the end of time He would die to save all those who had previously believed? Would there have been any propriety in His promising to die also for those who had previously rejected His kind offers and been lost? As far as the design of the Atonement, the purpose to be attained by His death, is concerned, what conceivable difference does it make whether the sacrifice of Christ be offered at the beginning, the middle, or the end of human history? If He had died at the end, He certainly could not die for those who had previously rejected His offers and perished therefore. And since He did die in the middle, why may not the Gospel be offered on the same terms to all men, as well after as before His death? "The only difficulty lies in the fact that finite creatures are utterly unable to comprehend the sovereign will and the unchangeable all-knowledge of God, which absolutely shuts out all contingency in relation to the hopes, the fears, the doubts, the responsibilities, the struggles, of human beings. Events are contingent in themselves. But there is no contingency in relation to the Divine purpose. One event is conditioned in the Divine decree. God's purpose, His design of redemption, like every other Divine purpose, is timeless. What has been and what will be, who have believed and who will believe, are all the same to Him. To Him the believers and the elect are identical. His design in the Atonement may with absolute indifference be stated either as a design to save the elect, or as a design to save all who have believed or who would believe on His Son" (A. A. Hodge). "The preachers of the Gospel in their particular congregations, being utterly unacquainted with the purpose and secret counsel of God, being also forbidden to pry or search into it (Deuteronomy 29:29) may from hence justifiably call upon every man to believe, with assurance of salvation to every one in particular upon his so doing, knowing and being fully persuaded of this, that there is enough in the death of Christ to save every one that shall so do; leaving the purpose and counsel of God, on whom He will bestow faith, and for whom in particular Christ died (even as they are commanded), to Himself" (J. Owen). Nothing but confusion can disturb our minds if we fail to distinguish sharply between God's eternal

purpose and man's present duty: the two things are quite distinct, and have no connection between them. The purpose or decree of God is not the rule of our duty, nor is the performance of our duty in doing what we are commanded any declaration of God's eternal counsels that it should be done. There is no sequel between the universal precepts of the Word and God's purpose in Himself concerning specific persons. The business of the preacher is to urge the fact that God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30), leaving it with the Spirit to work a saving repentance in whom He pleases. When I tell an individual sinner, "This is His command, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 3:23), I know not whether God has decreed to work a saving faith in him, nor is that any of my business; my duty is to discharge the commission Christ has given me, and the duty of my hearers is to comply with God's demands. God Himself will see to the accomplishment of His foreordination. Coming now to a closer answer to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter: the supreme business of God's servants is to preach Christ. Now to do this there must be a Scriptural setting forth of His glorious person, as the eternal Son, the Maker of heaven and earth. There must be an exposition of His two natures: His absolute Deity, His holy humanity. There must be an explanation of His offices: a Prophet to reveal the will of God, a Priest to offer Himself a sacrifice to God, a King to rule over the people of God. There must be a declaration of the two states in which He exercises His offices. First of humiliation: His condescension in becoming flesh, the reasons for this, and the glorious consequences of it. Second, His glorification: His exaltation to the right hand of God, His headship over the Church, His intercessory ministry. But supremely, there must be the preaching of His obedience to the law, His perfect righteousness, His vicarious death, the all-sufficiency of His merits to those who trust in Him. "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). We are not only to open up the mystery of His person, the manifold glories of His many offices, the perfections of His character, but, above all, we are to expound the meaning of the Cross. It is only by dwelling much on the varied significations of Calvary that the truth can be fully told out, whether the sinfulness of man's sin, or the greatness of God's love. To illustrate the various aspects of the sacrificial work of the Redeemer, a close study needs to be given to and then a free use made of the Old Testament types. But it is not sufficient to barely "preach" Christ, there must also be an application, made of what is revealed in Scripture concerning Him to the use of God's people, that their hearts may be drawn out to Him, and that they may see their interest in Him. To "preach" is to woo. The servant of God is not only an advocate pleading his Master's cause, refuting the objections of opposers, but he also is a witness, telling out of his own experience the preciousness of Christ. Thus he is to attract, allure and win souls to Him. That which best fits any minister to "preach" Christ is to himself walk and commune with Him! A part of some of the typical sacrifices was reserved as a feast for the offerer and his friends. So we must teach the saints to look away from self to Christ, to feed on Him, to live by Him, to be occupied with His perfections. Because men are by nature opposed to Christ, the servant of God must needs begin with the Law, so as to discover to them the dreadful state they are in. The claims of God upon us as His creatures must be pressed. The perfect and constant obedience which He requires from man must be clearly set forth. Then the utter failure of man to meet God's righteous claims upon him, and the exceeding sinfulness of his disobedience. A way must be made for the Gospel, by showing and convincing people that they are out of Christ, under the condemnation of a holy God, and of themselves utterly unable to liquidate their debts. The ministry of John the Baptist must precede that of Christ! The contents of Romans 1:18 to 3:20 must be stressed before the good news of Romans 3:21-26 is proclaimed. What need of a physician till we know we are sick? What need of a Savior till we know we are lost? What need of Christ to cleanse till we see our filthy defilement? At the outset, the preacher needs to recognize and realize that "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). No arguments of his can overcome, no inducements melt the heart of stone.

Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God only can give the "increase." Nothing short of the supernatural working of the Spirit can bring a sinner to Christ. Therefore both the preacher and his Christian hearers need to be much in prayer, seeking the Holy Spirit's grace and power to quicken, convict and convert the lost. We are fully assured that one principal reason why there are so few genuine conversions today, is because there is so little real and importunate praying unto God. "We are to dwell largely on the being and perfections of God, and our original obligations to Him, who is by nature our Creator. We are particularly to explain the nature and reasonableness of the Divine law, and to answer the sinner's objections against it. We are to exhibit to his view the sin which he stands charged with in the Divine law, and the curse he is under for it, and the only way of obtaining pardon through the blood of Christ. In a word, we are to open to his view the whole plan of the Gospel, the infinite riches of God's grace, the nature and sufficiency of Christ's atonement, the readiness of God to forgive repenting sinners who come to Him in the name of Christ, the calls and invitations of the Gospel, the dreadfulfulness of eternal misery in the lake of fire and brimstone; the glory and blessedness of the heavenly state, the shortness and uncertainty of time, the worth of his soul, the dangers which attend him, from the world, the flesh and the devil, the inexcusable guilt of final impenitence," etc. (Jos. Bellamy, 1759). It is most important for us to recognize and constantly bear in mind the fact that the Gospel is addressed to the sinner's responsibility. It is true from one viewpoint that the Gospel comes to men who are not on probation, but under God's condemnation, yet from another viewpoint (equally true) it is delivered to their accountability. It bids men to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), by which is meant, the throwing down of the weapons of their warfare against Him. It calls upon them to "forsake" their way and thoughts and return unto the Lord, and announces to all who do so that He will "have mercy upon" them (Isa. 55:7). It bids them "Repent and be converted," which means a right-about-face, a turning from sin and self-pleasing unto God, and this, in order that their "sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). It commands all men to believe in Christ and receive Him as their Lord. It announces that failure to believe is adding sin to sin and increasing their condemnation (John 3:18). The preaching of the Gospel is both a declaration of God's revealed will to pardon all who comply with its terms, and an insistence upon the duty devolving on all who hear it. The business of Christ's servants is to present what Scripture teaches concerning the salvation of men and the way which God has ordained in order to their obtaining of it. We are constantly to press the fact that God has inseparably connected salvation with repentance and faith. Many today are laboring under the delusion that the only relation between God and men is that of Creditor and debtors, and that Christ paid the whole debt, and therefore none are under any obligations of duty, and that all God now requires from any sinner is for him to believe that Christ has done all, and that faith is merely and simply a resting and relying in that fact. But such a concept is a fatal delusion, and grossly dishonoring to God. The God of the New Testament is not another God from Him who is revealed in the Old Testament! God is there set forth as the Lawgiver, as the Ruler over all, requiring perfect conformity to His demands. Now those requirements of God were neither unjust nor tyrannical, but instead, righteous and merciful. Nor did Christ come here to abrogate the law, but rather to "magnify the law, and make it honorable" (Isa. 42:21). And when the Holy Spirit begins a saving work in the soul, He presses the requirements of God's law, convicts of failure to meet those requirements, and produces a deep and lasting sorrow for such failure. Further, He creates in the heart which He renews a love for the law (Rom. 7:22) and a holy longing and determination to please and serve God. Thus, the work of the Spirit in those who are truly saved is not to the setting aside of that duty which every man owes to God — his Maker, Sustainer, and Governor — but is the imparting of a delight unto and power for the performance of that duty! Thus the first duty of the evangelist is to call upon all men to repent: see Mark 1:15. This is his very commission from Christ: see Luke 24:47. It was thus that Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19) and Paul evangelized: see Acts 17:30; 20:21. Our business is to

show why God requires this repentance, namely, for us to acknowledge the righteousness of His claims upon us. Our business is to show what repentance consists of: see Proverbs 28:13; Acts 3:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; etc. Our business is to emphasize the fact that God never has and never will pardon any sinner until he does repent: see Leviticus 23:29; 26:40-42; 1 Kings 8:46-50; Psalm 32:3-5; Jeremiah 4:4; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Luke 5:32; 13:3; Acts 3:19; 11:18; 2 Corinthians 7:10. The next great duty of the evangelist is to call on his hearers to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." That this call may be something much more than a mere uttering of the word "Believe!", "Believe!" we must carefully define and explain what saving faith consists of. That it is, First, a sincere renunciation of all other ways and means of salvation: Acts 4:12. Second, that it is the free and full consent of the heart to God's way of salvation: Romans 10:9. Third, that it is a personal trusting in Christ and relying upon the sufficiency of His satisfaction unto God: Acts 16:31. Saving faith is more than a bare belief of the Truth. The dying Israelites might have been fully assured that a look at the brazen serpent would give healing, but until they actually "looked," in full confidence in God's promise, they had not benefited one whit! None receive a soul-freeing discharge from the power and penalty of sin till they believe in Christ. Though the law of God has been satisfied and every demand of His justice met as to the sins of the elect, yet this has not hindered God from ascribing such a way for their coming to Him as is suited to the exalting of His glory and the honor of Christ. This the Spirit accomplishes by preparing the soul of the sinner for the enjoyment of God, and that, by the "law of faith." The benefits of Christ's death are only applied when we believe. The personal state of those for whom He shed His blood is not actually changed by His death itself, for they still lie under the curse whilst they are unregenerate (Eph. 2:3). That which Christ has procured for His own is left in the hands of the Father, for Him to bestow when He sees fit. Repentance and faith are necessary not to add anything to Christ's atonement, nor to merit forgiveness, but only to the actual receiving of it. That which God calls the sinner to "believe" is the Gospel. The first act of faith does not consist in believing that Christ died for me, but that He died for sinners. Christ is presented as an Object of faith. The Gospel announces that the Lord Jesus stands ready to receive every sinner who will throw down the arms of his rebellion, and trust in Him alone for salvation. As I do this, and am saved by Him, I obtain clear evidence of my election unto salvation: John 6:37; 2 Thessalonians 2:13. The business of the preacher is not to "offer" Christ to sinners, but to "preach" Him, expounding the doctrine of the Gospel. Our duty is to give the general call; the Holy Spirit will see to its effectual application unto God's elect. The Gospel is a Divine fan: by it the wheat is separated from the chaff. "The Gospel is addressed equally to the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. To the one it is the savor of life — to the other the savor of death; hence it is depicted as a two-edged sword, proceeding out of the Redeemer's mouth. It resembles the pillar interposed between the Egyptians and Israel: 'It was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these.' 'If our Gospel,' says the apostle, 'be hid, it is hidden to them that are lost'; if men receive not the atonement made upon Calvary, as the only ground of their hope — if they do not take shelter under the Savior's wings, then 'there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,' which shall devour them as the implacable enemies of God" (James Haldane). While pressing on all their bounden duty to repent and believe, let not the servant of God be slack in plainly teaching that both repentance and faith are Divine gifts: Ephesians 2:8,9; Acts 5:31. The natural man can no more savingly repent and believe than he can create a world. John 6:44. "We may as well melt a flint, or turn a stone to flesh, as repent in our own strength. It is far above the power of nature, nay, most contrary to it. How can we hate sin, which naturally we love above all? forsake that which is as dear as ourselves? it is the almighty power of Christ which only can do this: we must rely on, seek to Him for it: Jeremiah 31:18; Lamentations 5:21" (D. Clarkson, 1690). Finally, let the servant of God see to it that his zeal in preaching the Gospel to the unsaved, does not cause him to withhold from "the children" their

needed bread. The reprobate may vomit it out, but the regenerate will be nourished thereby. Every preacher is under bonds to see to it that, at the close of his pastorate he can say, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Only by so doing will he fulfill his commission, preserve the balance of Truth, establish God's saints in the faith, and glorify his Master.

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