

The Atonement of Our Lord Jesus Christ - Part 2

by Paris Reidhead

The atonement of Jesus Christ is not necessary to render God merciful, but rather to reveal His love and mercy to humanity.

Scripture: Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:5, Isaiah 64:6, John 3:16, Romans 3:10, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Atonement Theology", "Divine Mercy"

Description

Paris Reidhead preaches about the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing the importance of contemplating God's being and the true essence of worship. He delves into the dark reality of human depravity and selfishness, highlighting the need for God's mercy and love to overcome man's sinful nature. Reidhead challenges the common misconceptions about God's vindictiveness and justice, emphasizing God's mercy, forgiveness, and love as the driving forces behind the atonement. He stresses the transformation that occurs when individuals are reconciled to God, leading to a life of joyful service and worship, centered on enjoying God's presence and glory.

Transcript

The Atonement of Our Lord Jesus Christ - Part 2 By Paris Reidhead* to consider the great being of God that we occupy ourselves with. Here is a musician that can spend much time listening to music; it seems to enter into his personality. Here's an artist who can sit and park his chair in front of a painting for a whole day that might tire me out in five or ten minutes, at the most. So there are different attractions in life but the Christian attraction is to derive his strength from the contemplation of God.

I've tried to make a difference between the gifts of God and the being of God. We thank God for all His gifts but the great enjoyment of the Christian life is a contemplation of who God is and who the Lord Jesus Christ Now our heavenly Father, we're glad and thankful for Thy love toward us that has brought us together with the desire to worship Thee. Oh, may each one of us who are Thy children realize that our most important function in coming to this little assembly is to worship Thee, so that Thou mightiest receive some pleasure and happiness from our very hearts.

And when we think, Oh Lord, that Thou didst create and fashion this whole world in order to place man upon it in those circumstances that would be conducive to his life, and that Thou didst create him with these wonderful endowments It has been upon my heart to speak in continuation of last Lord's Day

message on the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful that God has taken measures. I've been feasting on these truths all week in my broadcast preparations, and have rejoiced that God has allowed us to move out of this world into the heavenly world, and permitted us to think the wonderful thoughts of God.

And how restful, how wonderful, how profound that there is a God like the Bible tells us about. It's so relaxing is. This passage that was read has this wonderful verse in it, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit." (I Pet. 3:18) I wonder if we might arise for a word of prayer. and if we are conscious of that, how much more Thou must be conscious of it. But Lord, help us to react toward Thee in a way so that he might react toward Thee out of his own voluntary will.

We are painfully conscious, our God, of the difficulty of getting men to love Thee, that is pleasing to Thee, it that the greatest thing we have to do as Christians is not to win our fellow men for Christ, be that ever so important, but it is to worship Thee and serve Thee, glorify Thee and make Thy great heart happy. For Thy happiness, Oh God, is of more value than all the happiness of all the mortals added together. So help us to have this perspective that we are to serve Thee with our whole hearts, and then, of course, we will take on Thy feeling toward the world, and so help us, Lord, to have that compassion.

Help us not to be hardened by the experiences of life, but that our heart may be tenderized by Thy great example, Lord Jesus, and by Thy great love. So we commit to Thee Thy Word this morning that it may feed our souls and strengthen our faith for the problems that face us. In Jesus' name. Amen. Let us view together, somewhat continuing our thinking of last Lord's Day, what are the problems and accomplishments of the atonement of our blessed Lord. Now, we may be sure of this, that so great an event as the atonement of Christ was not brought into existence without good reasons.

God certainly would never embark upon such a tremendous program if there was any possibility of another measure being taken to fulfill the same need. Now that's the wonderful thing that we derive out of the Word of God. I'm happy and thankful to God to be delivered from a lot of theological complications that inflicted my mind for years and years. I'm so glad to find in the Bible a God who does nothing apart from the exercise of His great intelligence. As we look forward to the acme of human performance, we think of the possibility of our living our living our lives every moment for some good reason.

And we think of focusing our attention on a worthwhile objective in life and applying our minds moment by moment to widely contribute toward that end. That's the height of Christian growth, isn't it, that we shall not have lapses into emotionalism or arbitrariness that so characterize the world. They are like sheep going astray without a shepherd. They have no purpose; they are not going anywhere. They are not trying to do anything--just a continuous gratification of their own imaginations, or whatever emotion happens to bubble the strongest, that's what they'll be doing.

But the real essence of Christian life is to have directive as to what we're trying to do in life. And the purpose of Christian growth is to use our intelligence so that every hour will count toward that objective. Now I'm so happy that the Bible reveals that God does nothing except out of His intelligence and out of His wisdom, and therefore, that God is not arbitrary in choosing one to be saved and in passing by another, for that would be no good reason, you see. God would simply forsake His heart of love. If He would go to a certain missionary tribe, a tribe a missionary is seeking

to reach, and arbitrarily pick out one and pass by others for no good reason, you see then God would be acting unintelligent. But the Bible wonderfully portrays that whatever God does, He does for intelligent reasons. And that's a wonderful power in the defeat of sin because there's no lack of intelligence to further sin, is there? Some fellow sits down and he has some emotional evil that he wants to create and he uses his intelligence and folks pay him for that, to see how he can furthering that depraved avenue of experience.

So the world folks furthering the cause of evil are using their intelligence, why should we not? And so God invites us to think with Him as to the reasons back of the great measure that He has taken. What then are not the reasons for the atonement? One great liberation of my thinking has been the deliverance from the concept that was fostered in and upon our Christian church just a few hundred years ago, and has not been in great acceptance until probably two centuries ago. It is the idea that in the very nature of God He cannot overcome His vindictiveness, in the matter of sin, and therefore, that the basic reason of the atonement of Jesus Christ was in some sense to satisfy the vindictiveness of God, or that God cannot exercise mercy until His justice is calculatingly satisfied.

Now come along with me on this process of thought. We understand a lot about that principle, do we not? That's the very principle we function upon as human beings apart from Christ. Because John the apostle said in his first epistle, "We love him," and him is not in the text. Actually, we are loving, a present tense, "because He first loved us." In other words, no human being, according to the Scripture, has ever exercised one ounce of real, true benevolent love apart from the reactive movement of the love and kindness of God.

So we understand a lot about vindictiveness. The world is always trying to get even, aren't they? And my, what a worry, what a tension, how many minds today are broken because of the worry about getting even in one form or another? How many thoughts people carry in their minds, a purpose someday and a secret hope that someday they'll be able to get even with so and so, and so and so. And if some evils happen to those they hope to get even with, they find an inner personal satisfaction even though they may go with express regret and sorrow.

So the very principle of vindictiveness is that we try to get exact and calculating justice. Now there's another thought here. We may be entirely mistaken to what real justice is. We may, of course, deepen our concept of the justice they deserve, or we may not make it deep enough. But with God that couldn't possibly exist, because with God the knowledge is perfect as to just exactly what perfect justice is. Now I ask you, is the great God of the heaven like that? You are aware, of course, that I doubt whether one theological treatise is in print at the present time which advocates that view I'm asserting.

They all uniformly assert that the atonement of Christ was made primarily to the person of God, the Father, to satisfy His vindictive justice. That God the Father is not actually merciful, that His justice prevents Him from being merciful, and so theology has, I believe, whittled away the most powerful tool of the gospel in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Theology has made out God the Father to be like we are. We certainly understand the principle of strict and precise justice, do we not?

And theology has made out God the Father to be just like that, and then hymnology to a large extent concerning the atonement has made the Lord Jesus Christ as more tender and more sympathetic toward sinners than the Father is. And then, in some mysterious way, God is the austere being that can hardly be reached, so calculating is His justice and the Lord Jesus is supposed to be more sympathetic, more kind,

more loving than the Father. And the Holy Spirit, well not too much is said, except that He is the applicator of the wonderful truths of redemption.

Now I submit to your thinking, how could such a thing possibly be? I got to thinking about it yesterday and it struck me with utter amazement that we could divide the beings of the trinity. That you can have one member of the trinity of a different sympathy than another member of the trinity, how could that be? The Bible reveals a great and glorious trinity, in a sense concerning all the members of the Godhead, that God is love. It does not distinguish between the basic motivating forces of any member of the trinity.

And so by no possibility could the Lord Jesus Christ be more loving, more sympathetic, more lenient, more compassionate than God the Father is, and with that thought, we must seek for a new aspect of the meaning of the atonement, and my soul is exceedingly liberated. If no one would ever listen to these thoughts, I bless the Lord; I could listen to my own thinking and find exceeding joy in the revelations of the Word of God concerning the Godhead. And when the Bible says that God the Father is different from us, that we are so prone to vindictiveness and strict and calculating justice that mercy has to be pinned down and cannot manifest itself.

And when I think that the Bible reveals God with all the attributes at His disposal and yet, mind you, after all that man has done against God, God's mercy and love and forgiveness overcome all the vindictiveness of His personality which makes God different from any human being that's ever walked the earth.

I think I could get folks to be excited to live for the Lord in the hopes that they're going to have a wonderful pleasure forever admiring the person of the Godhead. How wonderful that God's Word rescues us from all these falsifying ideas that out the very throb of God's heart of love. I got to study the longsuffering of God, and in order that I might appreciate what God is up against, I collected some of the Scriptures to show how bad God feels concerning sin. When you get the Word of God and its assertions as to how bad God feels hurt in His great essential being because of man, and when you think that little mere man can hinder and ruin the happiness of the great God, and you see what God has said and read what He has said to the prophets as to how bad God feels because of man's sin.

If we can feel bad when our children don't respond to some climax that we were looking for, how much more must God agonize over sinners. And so it's the throbbing message of the Bible that God's merciful forgiven overcomes His vindictive reaction. And that's the very essence of truth that makes me so excited, that gives me such a joy concerning God, that gives me a hunger to know more of such a God as this. Wonderful treasure of the Word of God, it is the mainspring of missionary activity, that we can go forth and say that there is a being in the universe that is as differ You've never seen anything like the nature of God, and when we portray the love and tenderness of God and when we view in ent from any other being that's ever walked the earth. a quantity God's love, how astonishing and marvelous.

So the atonement of Jesus, I'm exceedingly happy to say, and by the way this was a very common view during the revivals the last century but has somehow evaporated in our own century the mind and forges chains over the mind, the thinking individual can't shake it off. There's force in it, there's power in it, and . The very force, I believe, that will bring a revival among intelligent people when you can present the challenge of truth that arrests when the power of truths like this can be brought to the attention of thinking individuals, there's bound to be some kind of an earthquake.

But let's read a couple Scriptures. We think of God's expression to this great servant of His, Nehemiah, in the 9th chapter, verses 16 and 17. "But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and

hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage." Woul control by the essence of His great and profound love.

In other words, God does not react like we do, and as I'm thinking, I think of the disciples as they went with Jesus, and one time the Samaritans didn't behave just right concerning Jesus, and they got indignant for His sake and said, "Would you that we bid fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus didn't say they didn't deserve it but He said, "Ye know not what spirit ye are of. The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke 9:55,56) So here, in spite of this reaction, what do we read here?

"B all away and put them all to death. So great was His indignation, and righteously so after all He had done, wouldn't you expect dn't you expect this passage to go on, and God got so angry at them and in His infinite righteousness did He cause a might cloud to settle down over them and cast them that now? But look what the Word of God says, and that's the greatest gem of truth that comes forth from the Scriptures--that God, in spite of all His inner reactions, is in complete ut thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful; slow to anger and of great kindness and forsookest them not." (Neh. 9:17b) What a collection of terms concerning our great God.

How happy we should be over the thought that God is love and kindness above all our comprehension. We've read Psalm 86:5 where the psalmist was lifted up in worship--"For thou Lord art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that calls upon thee." So here God is pictured as ready to forgive, and this was the very thing that Jonah was afraid of, was it not? The reason he gave why he disobeyed God was that he was afraid that God's heart would be moved, and God would forget His iron hand of judgment, just exactly what Jonah was afraid of.

God, I know you enough to know that I'm afraid you'll embarrass me, and while I want the judgment to go on and I even want the judgment for your sake, even pray dear Lord that you'll send judgment for your sake. Let's be careful about our distinguishing our prayers, and the very thing that Jonah was afraid of, that the great God in heaven would be moved with compassion and would change His mind and embarrass Jonah, and he says, "I don't want to be embarrassed, Lord." I suppose he might have said, for his sake.

Oh, how deceptive our hearts can get many times. Then we think of that great verse, John 3:16--"God so loved the world that he gave." God didn't have a mixture in causing the great measure of the atonement. I'm so thrilled at the concept that there is a great God, and when I'm thrilled at the very essence of His being and I contemplate the greatness of His being, I am all the more thrilled. When we form some concept of the extensiveness of God's universe and consider the greatness of His essence beyond all our comprehension, I'm all the more thrilled to think that there is a God that has the tremendous attributes and yet is moved with the tender compassion. If a

mother has ever exercised love to her little tykes, let her realize that God is the creator and the source of that love. If a mother's love is ever dependent, let us realize that God's love is much more so. So I'm happy that the atonement of Jesus Christ was not necessary to render God the Father merciful. That God was not calculating every iota of His strict and personal justice before He would be willing to manifest mercy. We are not talking fiction, my friends. I talked to a leading preacher of a certain denomination at one time about this very thought and this brother said, "Well, now, God is not now merciful.

God has been merciful in extending the atonement but God is not now extending one bit of mercy. God was merciful in sending the Lord to die and pay for the sins of self, so all the mercy He is ever going to extend, He has already extended." Can you fashion going forth and trying to serve the Lord with such a message? Do you wonder why preachers' hearts are moved and melted and broken down? Do you wonder what these ideas; have done to the spiritual state of the church? But I'm glad that the Bible warms our hearts, gives us a concept that's beyond our thinking.

In Ephesians 4:32 we are to "be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." There's no thought of any kind of vindictive justice that we are to extract from one another, and this text says that just as we are to go forth and freely forgive, just like God freely forgave. And that we are to extract no justice from anyone but go forth in the extreme kindness and love, just as God has done to us. And so the vindictive nature of God cannot be a requirement for the great measure of the blessed atonement.

What about some other things? Is man who is utterly devoid of anything that would attract God. We read in the book of Romans, verses 12 and 23, of the 3rd chapter, "Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness," and so forth as we go through that text. Then in verse 12, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

None that doeth good. None that doeth one act of goodness. Scripture maintains that if you analyze the apparent works of goodness that prevail in this world among those that don't love God, you can find a selfish motive somewhere that is the mainspring of all their work. That what we studied last Sunday in that tremendous passage in Matthew 7:21-23 where we have the many religious leaders knocking on the door of heaven and claiming their works, you see. They said they did many, many wonderful works, and what did Jesus say?

"Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity." (Psa. 6:8) What? "Worker of iniquity?" Weren't we doing works of benevolence and kindness? Weren't we trying to cast out devils and further your work, Lord? "Workers of iniquity?" What meanest Thou? Can't you see the objection that shall someday rise up from multitudes who are today in churches with a false profession, and God looks upon their heart and saying, apart from the regenerating grace of God, every act that appears to be benevolent has a selfish motive somewhere in it.

Yes, a pastor can do quite famously in building a church and building a large congregation if he's a psychological specialist, if he's sharp to observe the particular things that fascinate each individual. I'm reminded of a farmer that I stayed with several days, and I was intrigued by his extreme orderliness about his little farm. It wasn't too large and yet it was extremely efficient. I was interested to walk along with him a little bit, look at some of his creatures and some of the thing he said and how he went through the farm with me.

He didn't have more than a dozen cows, but he said, now there's a cow that I give this kind of food to and here's another one where I mix a little something more, and here's another where I proportion this. As a result, he had this thing so complicated that even his boys couldn't feed his stock, and he couldn't go away from home. Now that was a clever accomplishment on his part in analyzing what made each cow give the most milk. And if pastors get specialized in that way, they can be quite successful in building up an apparent work for God.

If they cater at just the right time, if they reward in just the correct fashion, if they know how to feed each individual just right, great things can be done. But the Scripture said that apart from the regenerating grace of God there's a selfish motive behind every action, and isn't that a depressing thing? Doesn't it completely collapse our concept of moral goodness? Now we're glad that the world all at once doesn't go to pieces, aren't we? And God, I believe, is cooperating and operating in various ways to prevent it from going to pieces.

But the Scripture reveals the bold fact that the selfish heart of man manifests itself in every avenue and is a very complicated and complex thing. I told you about the great building up here in Oberlin on the campus. Some fellow gave, I don't know how many million dollars, and I got to looking at that thing and I thought, well now, that's quite a sum. I said to one of the faculty men there, "I suppose it seats quite a large audience." "No," he said, "It only seats about six or eight hundred." I said, "Six or eight hundred, with that great investment?" And then as we went over and saw the thing being built, the front was amazingly impressive. Here was a

great big marble front with the embossment of the name of the donor. Here was a tremendous structure that gave a tremendous appearance. Now I ask you, what do you think was the reason back of that apparent benevolence? And so the Scripture reveals that every act of a human being apart, from the grace of Jesus Christ has a selfish motive in it somewhere, and that's humiliating, isn't it? Now I say that you would think that that would be a barrier to God's mercy, wouldn't you?

But an endless state of persistent selfishness, think of it, that God looks down and sees the motives of men. What a complete opposite evaluation that must result in over man's evaluation. That's why the Scriptures say, "God looketh on the heart," and can evaluate truly what everyone is trying to do, but I'm happy to say as I view that dark picture I get a more elevated picture of God. (I Sam. 16:7) You see the reaction? Man is in a most degraded state of selfishness. Now, mercy, some people wouldn't be caught in the deep outward bondages of sin but they're not virtuous in that.

They wouldn't not be caught in there, because they have an intellectual training that it wouldn't be for their profit, all things considered, that they go out in those forms of indulgences. Maybe they developed the faculty of wanting to be thought well of by fellow men and looks like it ought to be worth something. The whole thing resolves itself into selfishness, and until men begin to hate sin for what sin is and begin to love God for the true sake of love, no virtue exists.

Now I say out of that dark picture, there emerges in my mind a wonderful concept of God. In the book of Genesis there concerning the flood, God looked down and saw the imagination of men's heart was only evil. That would be bad enough, if the extra word wasn't put on there, but only evil continually. And so men were taking the cultured imagination that God had given, the imagination is the most marvelous thing; it's the endowment that enables man to imagine what God is like.

And so, apart from that faculty of imagination, we could never worship God. That's the faculty God has endowed us with that we perceive by our divine gift what God is like in His essence, and by virtue of that imagination, we can worship God with all our hearts. That's what makes the difference between a human being and an animal. You can bring an animal into this situation like I've commented in times before. You could lay some food before it and when it's through with its food, it might lay down and pay no attention to our spiritual seeking, have no concern with it at all.

Why not? Because it has not been endowed with that wonderful quality of imagination. It cannot imagine what God is like; therefore it doesn't pay any attention to discussions about God. But man has been given that wonderful quality of imagination, but what has he done with it? He has used it to imagine what various types of sin would be like, and so this very elevated thing that God has given has been depraved and debased and debauched to imagine all kinds of evil things. Oh, how God must be hurt over this whole situation, and so the deeper our concept of man goes in the face of the Scripture, the more glorious do we consider God out of His love and out of His virtue.

Oh, how Isaiah was humbling to His audience. He was evidently a great preacher and a great servant of the Lord, but very unsuccessful, so success does not evaluate ministry. But here in this 64th chapter of Isaiah and verse 6, this verse we are familiar with, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf and our iniquities like the wind have taken us away." All our righteousness, all the things that we thought righteous, in other words, are as filthy rags because, apart from the grace of God, we are moved by selfish motives, which color the whole being.

If you got a glass full of beautiful spring water, we saw some folks stopping to get some clear water, I suppose, and filling up their jugs. If the little tyke, after they get home, opens one of these jugs of nice, clear sparkling water and drops few pinches of some coloring matter into it, the whole thing is tainted. So with God, just when men think they have righteousness in manifestation, God sees that the whole thing is colored by selfish motives. Yet, my friends, this is not an impossible obstacle to the mercy of God.

As we paint the dark picture of human kind, and we view that God, in spite of all, has been moved with great movements of compassion and love. But you say, "Wait a minute, don't some of these folks walking down here on this earth with this great quality of imagination and ability to think, this great endowment that God has given them, do not some of them seek after God?" It would be bad enough, if mankind was evil continually, if they had peak moments when they suddenly emerged or tried to emerge out of it, if you please.

But according to the Word of God, nobody is even trying to emerge out of selfishness. And so if the other picture was dark, this picture is much darker. Not only do we have human kind in one mass of taint of selfish complexity of psychological problems, and the psychologists are supposed to be something like a lawyer. A lawyer's education consists mostly, as most of you realize, in studying what has happened in the realm of law and to be conversant on what has happened in all the areas of the world, if possible, to build up a better law background, so that they have wisdom in dealing with certain

situations, the psychologist is trying to be like the chemist only in the intellectual sphere. The chemist is analyzing all kinds of things. We've got a research chemical organization that's been increased. It's been there for years. But these fellows have liberty to explore anything that they think might have possibility. So they are scratching their heads as to what would happen if we combine this with this and what would happen in this situation and if we would analyze this and do this, what would happen?

They are looking for facts in the materialistic realm that have to do with fluids. The psychologist is looking for facts that have to do in the intellectual realm by which men have successive thoughts and act as they do, and he's trying to be an analyst as to cause and effect--what situation results in this and why men decide this and try to analyze the emotional life and its effect on the will and where the intellect comes in in this whole situation. So there's a great analysis going on.

And God looks down upon this analysis, and it's terribly bad as we've seen from the descriptions of the Word of God, but you say, "Aren't there some who try to find God and be reconciled to God? Aren't there some who have peak moments of psychology where they arise out of their bondage and seek after God? Aren't there some who get down on their knees and really, sincerely pray that they might find God and forsake their sinful ways?" You'd certainly think so, wouldn't you? But according to the Scripture such is not the case.

And there we have in Romans again, chapter 3 and verse 10, "As it is written, there is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. There is none that seeketh after God." So if man is depraved in the tenor of his life, how much more an obstacle it is, "that no one is ever seeking after God." Oh, folk can do a lot of praying when the time gets hard. I wonder what God thinks of all the promises that were made during the war times.

I can imagine I know a lot of the things that have happened. Think of all the promises that if God would spare them through the climax, what they would do. They would serve God; they would give their lives for God. Are they doing it? Thereby, you can find out whether they sincerely sought God, or not. But the Scriptures reveal the tragic fact that nobody ever sought after God. Not only is man depraved in his imagination but man never has peaks where he emerges out of his depravity.

Man never has peaks of his performance where he really tries to make God happy. There is just one endless persistence of selfish will and that's not even interrupted by climaxes of psychological reaction. Oh, think what God looks down and sees, but think, my friends, further how wonderful is the picture of God. So, if the artist can sit before a picture and admire the color schemes and the combinations and the details, how about us as Christians sitting before the Word of God with one hand lifted in prayer that the spirit of the living God shall illuminate our minds to perceive the nature of God.

And so by these dark pictures we are trying to portray something of what God is like. We've all seen artists, haven't we, as they began their picture, and my, it looked like a murky thing. I remember one I was looking at, a very fine Christian Brother, and he was painting a picture before us to illustrate spiritual things. What did he do? He took some dark old musty colors and swept the board and took his hand and smudged it all up some more. My goodness alive, I said to myself, what can ever come out of this thing?

Then as he went on and put other colors on it and pretty soon the lights were turned down, and here we were amazed at the light reaction, a mysterious thing, that certain colors react to certain lights and other colors do not, and here we had a marvelous picture emerging out of this dark smudge. So I say, that the sin of man is indeed a dark smudge, and the fact that nobody is seeking after God is indeed a darker smudge. But this in the background out of which the beautiful, attractive nature of God is manifested and we can enjoy this picture no matter how rough things are today.

No matter how dark things are today in our own experience in any sort, we have in the Bible, the Word of God, a description that God has not been limited in His great manifestation of love and benevolence because of the darkness and persistency of man's sin. Oh my, that the spirit of the living God would help us to realize the love of God. I'm so grateful in my own heart for God's Word. I'm so grateful that when things look depressing in various situations, there's a sunrise, there's an anchor point of the soul, there's a reality in the great nature of God that calls forth our humbling worship.

And so this blessed text that we have read describes the great fact of the universe--"Christ hath also once suffered for sins." There was no other way, no other way. There's a reason back of God's tremendous

measures, and when you see the hopeless situation as it is, God cannot look to man to take the initiative toward Him. But out of His great mercy He has taken the initiative toward us. So the Lord Jesus Christ has come into the world and has suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.

He had no one to accuse Him of sin. He could say, which of you convinceth me of sin? And thus, He could die for the sins of the whole world, the just for the unjust. We have described something of the injustice of our human family which is not a barrier to God's abounding love. Oh, I'm so thankful to God for such a message, for such a thrilling concept that we can have in our minds that

by the spirit of the living God we can view something of the great essence of God, and truly admire the great manifestations of His personality. "He died, the just for the unjust." What for? "That He might bring us to God." Now certainly this must be a wonderful thing, and as we think of the atonement having been accomplished and the spirit of God goes forth to plead with us, aren't you glad that He's pled with you? There's one other side to this, of course, man can resist all the pleadings of God.

Man does not seek God to be reconciled, but man can refuse to be reconciled. So as the spirit of God goes forth with the glorious message of redemption, that He might bring us to God. Now I ask you, what was His objective? Was His objective to get folk into heaven? Is that what this text says? That seem to be mostly the great objective of most preachers and pastors to protect their flock so they will get them safely on the other shore, and to get a lot of folk into heaven, and get them eternally saved, they say, by some mysterious process.

Where is the transformation to be found? Are they going to be happy when they get to heaven? It's a vital question, isn't it? Think of it, folks getting to heaven who aren't happy with God here. Why, to go into heaven in the very presence of God would be a state of torment, wouldn't it? The gospel of Jesus Christ, bless the name of the Lord, was given to reconcile men to God, to bring us to God, so that we enjoy the great God of the universe, and enjoy Him forever. If you're not reconciled to God, how could you enjoy God?

So Jesus came that He might bring us to God. When His face was such as would go someplace, that was the reason for it. Because of the joy that was set before Him, we are told, He endured the cross, despising the shame, set down at the right hand of God. What was the joy set before Him? That we poor mortals might respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit of God in convicting us of sin through the Word of God to utter prayers, to admonitions from God's servants, to perform the natural function that are around us.

All these things are tools in the hands of the spirit of God to awaken us to the reality of God's truth, that somehow by those reactions of the spirit of God, we might become aware of the true situation of sin and be reconciled and won to God in a happy state of worship and praise, that we who were so bent on selfishness, now hallelujah, are bent on serving the Lord, that we might be brought to the place where we enjoy God. We don't run around holding our hand on our pulses, "Now, I'd better take care of myself now.

I'd better make myself live as long as possible. Mercy, it's so vital that I take care of myself," and so people are so worried about every little thing. Mercy, if they have some trace of cancer bubbling up somewhere, they've got to watch that, by all means. Mercy, the Christian's life, the Christian will live and abide by Jesus Christ. True, He will take care of his life but for a different reason, not just this little fantastic bubble of selfishness that infers peoples' hearts all the time.

We ought to live for the glory of God and be wise, I admit. Finney's¹ life was prolonged for twenty years, or thereabouts, because he took that measure and figures, well, if I keep going like this in revivalism, (he almost died there in the 60's,) God laid on his heart that he'd better start being a little wiser with himself so that he might be an extended influence that God had brought him into. And as a result of that, he was able to teach many thousands more of servants of the Lord and be an influence in the world.

So we can get wise in that respect, and I'm not talking about godly wisdom, I'm talking about this fantastic fever of selfishness that prevails. And so Jesus came that He might bring us to God and reconciles us to the place where we enjoy God. What a transformation has to happen and nothing short of that is conversion. So the true Christian is happy in the Lord, he is happy to serve God. All the things of the world are in a secondary plane, but to serve Jesus Christ, that's his heart.

He does not have to be pepped up and injected and have all kinds of pastoral brilliancies to get him to serve the Lord. He's rather with a great heart to serve the Lord and all he needs is direction. And so what a wonderful state God has brought us into by the grace of Christ. And then, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. Aren't we glad that Jesus is the living Christ? The glorified Christ? No more to be in a state of humiliation. Our heavenly Father, as we close our meditation of Thy great and glorious and loving heart, how we thank Thee for the revelations of Scripture.

So seal to our minds these tremendous truths in Thy Word. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. * Reference such as: Delivered at the Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City, NY Sunday, May 31, 1959 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor. ©PRBTMI 1959 1 Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) An American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States.

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