

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 23. Its Reception

by A.W. Pink

Transcript

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 23. Its Reception

"What must I do to be saved?" is the earnest and urgent inquiry of one who has been truly awakened by the Holy Spirit and made to feel his lost condition and deserts of eternal punishment. Where such an inquiry is sincerely made, the comforting answer furnished by the Scripture is simple and plain: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Yet this does not mean that the preaching of the Gospel is an easy matter, for which every Christian is qualified. Far, far from it. From the Divine side, none but those called of God and supernaturally taught by Him are fitted for such a blessed and solemn task; from the human side, a life's constant study is required to prepare a servant of Christ for proclaiming His "unsearchable riches." Incalculable damage has been wrought by novices running into evangelical activities without being sent of God. To all such we would say, "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom" (Job 13:5). In the last chapter we sought to indicate, though in little more than outline form, something of what is comprehended by or included in the proclamation of the Atonement. Briefly stated it is this: an exposition and explanation of the teaching of Scripture concerning the wondrous person of the God-man, of His relation to the Church as Sponsor and Surety, of His varied offices, of His perfect work; freely setting Him forth as an all-sufficient Savior, ready to receive any who truly feel their need of Him and who trust in Him. In this chapter our aim is to set forth how the virtue of His sacrifice actually becomes ours, in what way we are made the recipients of those priceless blessings which He purchased for His people. O may the Spirit so guide us into the Truth that we may be enabled to treat of this important section of our subject in such a way as to truly honor God, edify His people, and help exercise souls. In taking up the reception of the Atonement two things need to be kept quite distinct and treated of separately, namely, the operation of the Spirit, and the act of the awakened sinner. Some of the older writers distinguished these two things by employing the terms, the application of the Atonement and the appropriation of it: probably we cannot improve upon them. The one speaks of the benefits of Christ's satisfaction being brought to those for whom it was made; the other, having reference to us laying hold of them and making them ours. It is much like the two-fold mention of the tabernacle's furniture in Exodus, or the order of the five great offerings in the opening chapter of Leviticus. God began with the "ark" (Ex. 25:10), then the "mercy-seat" (25:17), the "table" (25:23), the "candlestick" (25:31), and then the "brazen altar" (27:1); but it was the very opposite with Aaron (the representative of the people): he had to commence at the altar of sacrifice, and came last of all to the ark. So the Divine order of the offerings was the burnt, meat, peace, and the sin and trespass; but as men used them (according to their needs) they

had to begin with the sin-offering. The great Satisfaction or Atonement originated in the mind of God, and was formulated in the terms of the everlasting covenant, which was drawn up between the Father and the Mediator. It was accomplished here on earth by Christ, the incarnate Son, who by His perfect obedience and sufferings met every demand of the law and procured the eternal salvation for that people which had been given to Him and whose Sponsor He was. It is proclaimed and propounded in the Gospel, and is expounded by the true servants of the Lord Jesus. The particular aspect of this mighty theme which is now to engage our attention is, How is the Atonement made good to those for whom it was offered? Through what Divinely-appointed channel do the virtues of Christ's redemptive work actually reach the individual soul? In other words, what is required before a sinner today Personally receives the saving benefits of that wondrous transaction which was consummated at the Cross almost two thousand years ago? The answer which is now generally returned to this question is, that it is by means of the Gospel salvation is conveyed to the soul. But obviously this answer is quite inadequate, for the great majority of those who hear the glad tidings which are published by the servants of Christ, are not saved thereby. To some the Gospel is "a savor of life unto life," to others it is "a savor of death unto death." What, then, is it which makes the difference? To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance"(1 Thess. 1:5). The reference here is to the gracious and invincible operations of the third Person of the Trinity. God the Father is the Author of our salvation; God the Son is the Purchaser of it; God the Spirit is the Conveyer. The imperative need for the work of the Spirit in order to make effectual the Atonement unto the actual saving of sinners is little perceived in these degenerate times, even by professing Christians. That man is a fallen creature is still allowed in some circles, nor has the term "total depravity" entirely disappeared from present-day preaching; yet as to the terrible consequences which sin has wrought in the human constitution, scarcely any now have more than the vaguest conceptions. So long as a man obeys the laws of his country, discharges with measurable faithfulness his human obligations, and does not grossly defy the commandments of God, it is popularly assumed that there is little wrong with him. That his heart is desperately wicked, that his mind is filled with enmity against God, that his will is antagonistic to Him, that he is altogether unconscious of the deadly virus of sin which has corrupted every part of his inner being, and which has completely unfitted him for any communion with the thrice Holy One, is something which is altogether unknown to the vast majority of those now bearing the name of Christian. The truth is that the natural man is dead in trespasses and sins. Because of this he is oblivious to the righteous claims of God upon him, and therefore knows not that in view of his failure to meet those claims the wrath of God abides upon him. Because there is no spiritual life within him, he has no spiritual relish of or appetite for Divine things, though he may (through religious education) have an intellectual and theoretical interest in them. Because the natural man is alienated from the life of God, he is completely under the dominion of sin, so that the pleasing of self (having his own way) is the governing principle of his whole life. Tell him that he is on his way to the everlasting burnings, and that they are his just due, and he believes it not. Either he thinks that he has done nothing which deserves such terrible punishment, or he supposes that he has been "delivered from the wrath to come." Having no spiritual perception, his understanding being "darkened" (Eph. 4:18), it is impossible that he should be conscious of his dreadful condition or see his dire need. Only the Spirit of God can awaken any sinner from the sleep of death: only He can impart spiritual life to the soul, supernatural light to the understanding, and sight to the eyes of the heart. This is what He is sent to do. He is "the Servant" of the Godhead who is here to bring in "the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind." He is the One who has been given to "compel to come in" that the Father's House may be filled with the appointed guests (Luke 14:21,23). He compels by His sweet constraints, making the unwilling willing, creating in their heart a desire for the Feast, making them to be conscious of their deep need of the Bread of life. The Holy Spirit is

the One who shines into the sin-darkened mind so that it is made conscious of its vileness. He is the One who so searches the conscience that the individual is made to feel he is the greatest sinner out of Hell. He is the One who subdues the principle of self-love and self-will, so that the soul is brought into subjection to God. He is the One who communicates faith, so that the heart is enabled to embrace Christ as a Personal Lord and Savior. "The Holy Spirit is as indispensable to your believing, as is Christ in order to your being pardoned. The Holy Spirit's work is direct and powerful; and you will not rid yourself of your difficulties by trying to persuade yourself that His operations are all indirect, and merely those of a Teacher presenting truth to you. Salvation for the sinner is Christ's work; salvation in the sinner is the Spirit's work. Of this internal salvation He is the beginner and the ender. He works in you, in order to your believing, as truly as He works in you after you have believed. "This doctrine, instead of being a discouragement, is one of unspeakable encouragement to the sinner; and he will acknowledge this, if he knows himself to be the thoroughly helpless being which the Bible says he is. If he is not totally depraved, he will feel the doctrine of the Spirit's work a hindrance, and an insult, no doubt, just as an able-bodied traveler would feel that you were both hindering and insulting him, if you told him that he cannot set out on his journey without taking your arm. But as, in that case, he will be able to save himself without much assistance, he might just set aside the Spirit altogether, and work his way to heaven alone! The truth is, that without the Spirit's direct and almighty help, there could be no hope for a totally depraved being at all. . . "If you understand the genuine Gospel in all its freeness, you will feel that the man who tries to persuade you that you have strength enough left to do without the Spirit, is as great an enemy of the cross, and of your soul, as the man who wants to make you believe that you are not altogether guilty, but have some remaining goodness, and therefore do not need to be wholly indebted for pardon to the blood and righteousness of Immanuel. 'Without strength' is as literal a description of your state, as 'without goodness.' If you understand the Gospel, the consciousness of your total helplessness would just be the discovery that you are the very sinner to whom the great salvation is sent; that your inability was all foreseen and provided for, and that you are in the very position which needs, which calls for, and which shall receive, the aid of the Almighty Spirit. "Till you feel yourself in this extremity of weakness, you are not in a condition (if I may say so) to receive the heavenly help. Your idea of remaining ability is the very thing that repels the help of the Spirit, just as any idea of remaining goodness thrusts away the propitiation of the Savior. It is your not seeing that you have no strength that is keeping you from believing. So long as you think you have some strength, in doing something — and especially in performing, to your own and Satan's satisfaction, that great act or exercise of soul called 'faith.' But when you find out that you have no strength left you will, in blessed despair, cease to work — and (ere you are aware) — believe! For, if believing be not a ceasing from work, it is at least the necessary and immediate result of it. You expended your little stock of imagined strength in holding fast the ropes of self-righteousness, but now, when the conviction of having no strength at all is forced upon you, you drop into the arms of Jesus. But this you will never do so long as you fancy that you have strength to believe" (From God's Way of Peace by H. Bonar). O that there were many preachers today honoring the third person of the Trinity by thus magnifying and emphasizing His part in the work of salvation. O that the modern evangelist would faithfully press upon his unsaved hearers their utter powerlessness to turn unto God of themselves, and their inability to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior until a miracle of Divine grace has been wrought in them. The Lord Jesus (our Exemplar) did not hesitate to plainly say to a promiscuous crowd, "No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him" (John 6:44). The Father draws to Christ by the operation of the Spirit. It is written, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Believing is necessary, indispensably necessary, before any sinner receives Divine forgiveness. But Scripture is very emphatic in declaring that

no sinner can savingly believe apart from the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit. A miracle of grace has to be wrought in his heart before he is capacitated to lay hold of Christ. This must be so, for the human heart is fast closed against Him and will not come to Him that it might have life (John 5:40). The eyes of our understanding are blind, so that we see in Christ no beauty that we should desire Him. It is with the heart that man believeth unto righteousness (Rom. 10:10), and the heart must first be wooed and won by Christ (through the Spirit's operations) before it will turn to Him. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). Until this takes place, the Lord has to say of us all, "I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42). In the application of the Atonement to the elect, each of them is entirely passive. Until the Holy Spirit has performed His initial work of grace in the soul, not only is each individual utterly incapable of seeking after Christ (see Romans 3:11), but he has no desire toward Him and no sense of his real need of Him. Not until he has been Divinely quickened and brought out of that grave into which the fall of Adam brought us all (Rom. 5:12), is any man capable of performing any spiritual actions. There cannot be the manifestations of life before life itself is imparted. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters, neither can a corrupt heart delight in a holy object. An evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit, neither can the unregenerate hate sin or love God. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). For one who by sinful instinct loved and idolized self, making everything subservient to having his own way, to be brought to deny and loathe himself (Job 42:6), and to forsake his own ways (Isa. 55:7), is something which nothing short of Omnipotence can bring about. For one who naturally hates God (desiring rather to think about and be occupied with any one or any thing else) to be brought to love Him and delight in Him — love Him with all the heart and delight in Him supremely — is indeed a miracle of grace. Yet, let it be pointed out that true love to God is not begotten by fears of Hell nor by hopes of Heaven — the promptings of self-preservation will produce the one, as the workings of self-love will inspire the other. No, unless I love God for what He is in Himself, I do not love Him at all, but only lie to Him with my lips. Yet it is only the Spirit who can cause any soul to say from the heart, "Who is like unto thee, O Lord. . . glorious in holiness!" (Ex. 15:11) Thus, each person of the Godhead is due His own particular praise. The Father for having chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and predestinated us unto the adoption of children. The Son for having served as our Surety, fulfilled our obligations, and paid our debts. The Spirit for having brought us from death unto life, convicted us of our lost condition, awakened us to our need of Christ, and drawn us to Him. If the Father is to be adored because of His predestination, and the Son because of His propitiation, equally so is the Spirit for His regeneration. We are indebted to the One as much as to the Others. The work of Christ had been in vain, were it not for the work of the Spirit in us. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15) applies as much to the Comforter as it does to the Redeemer. The embracing of Christ by faith presupposes both a true knowledge of ourselves and of the Savior Himself. There has to be a Divine conviction given to us of that sin and wretchedness, thralldom and bondage, unto which we are reduced by the Fall. The law must be our schoolmaster unto Christ. Without a discovery to us of sin and misery by the law, the sinner will never flee unto Him who is "the end of the law for righteousness" (Rom. 10:4). A man at sea sailing in a shattered boat close unto a great rock, will refuse to leave his boat and cast himself upon the rock for safety, so long as he believes his boat is strong enough to carry him to land. But when the winds and waves beat into his frail craft and break her in pieces, and not till then, will he be glad to avail himself of the rock. So while the poor sinner imagines that his own doings and good intentions are sufficient to carry him through to Heaven, he will never betake himself to the Rock of ages. The powerful wind of the Spirit is needed to demolish that "refuge of lies" (Isa. 28:17) in which the sinner shelters, if ever he is to perceive, that a continuing to rest upon his own fancied goodness and righteousness must inevitably sink him into Hell. Not until the Spirit strips him of his own worthless doings, and makes him to

stand naked in all his shame and filthiness before God, will he truly cry, "What must I do to be saved?" As the apostle declared, "I was alive [in my own estimation] without the law once, but when the commandment came [when God applied it in power unto my understanding and conscience, and showed me how far short I came of its righteous demands] sin revived [I then had a real apprehension of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of my utter unfitness to stand for a moment before the thrice holy God], and I died" — saw myself as utterly lost (Rom. 7:9). Until the Spirit does press upon the soul the claims of God and its lifelong disregard of the same, until He applies to us that holy standard which bids us love God with all our heart, mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, and convicts us of the fact that not only have we made no honest attempt to do so, but have had no sincere desire to keep it, we are utterly blind to our dreadful sins of omission, Until the Spirit brings home to the heart our true state, notwithstanding all our selfish wishes to be delivered from Hell and taken to Heaven, yet the heart remains blind to the glory of God and what is due Him from us. So far from the unregenerate sinner being willing to repent of his sins, he knows nothing whatever about the worst of his sins. So far from desiring to humble himself before God, he is totally ignorant of the reason why he should humble himself. So far from being anxious to be made spiritually alive, he is quite oblivious to the fact that he is spiritually dead. And so far from seeking the gracious enablement of the Spirit to reconcile him to God, he is quite unaware that he is the enemy of God. But all of this is well-nigh wholly lost sight of today by preachers and evangelists. The general assumption is (even though it be not plainly formulated), there is so little wrong with the fallen descendants of Adam that all they need to do is read the Bible and hear the Gospel preached, and they will easily be turned to Christ. A little information, plus a little earnest persuasion, and almost anyone can be induced to sign a card and "accept Christ as his personal Savior." Consequently, the humble, dependent, fervent, united and patient waiting upon God for the power of His Spirit is a thing of the past; and so too (with very rare exceptions) are genuine miracles of grace. This Laodicean age "has need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17), least of all does it feel its dire and desperate need of the Spirit of God to awaken the dead, to pull down strongholds and cast down every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:4,5). Not until the sinner has been emptied of his self-sufficiency, convicted that he is an outlaw against God, and brought into the dust before Him, is he ready to appreciate Christ. Nor will he, nor can he, savingly embrace the Redeemer until the Spirit has revealed Christ in him. (Gal. 1:16). None can trust in a Savior they know not; and to know Christ as a living reality is a vastly different thing from having heard about Him from the pulpit, or even to have read of Him through the Scriptures. "For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6): this is what must take place before any soul truly trusts Him. Have you, my reader, experienced this supernatural revelation of Christ to your heart? Once the Holy Spirit really reveals Christ to the soul, he needs no urging to receive Him: "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Ps. 9:10). Now it is not only the Spirit's province to apply the law, convict of sin, empty of pride, break down self-will, subdue self-love, but it is also His blessed office to take of the things of Christ and show them unto (John 16:14) those for whom He died. He is here to teach those whom He awakens from the sleep of spiritual death who the Redeemer is, the wondrous offices which He sustains, the great purpose for which He came into the world. He is here to slay their enmity against Christ, to destroy their unbelief, and to impart a saving faith. He is here to bring them into a saving knowledge of the truth: as the Lord Himself declared, "They shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father [by the Spirit] cometh unto me" (John 6:45). The Spirit is here not to magnify Himself, but to glorify the Redeemer (John 16:14). He is here to reveal His lovely perfections unto God's elect, to win their hearts to Him, to conform them unto His blessed image. Various motives have induced us to dwell at length upon the application of the Atonement as it is received

by men. First, because this is the side of the Truth which most honors God, inasmuch as it gives to Him His proper place in the saving of sinners. Second, because of the appalling ignorance thereon which now so widely prevails. Third, so that the Christian reader may the better perceive how much he owes to the gracious operations of the Spirit. Fourth, to make clear to preachers and evangelists the urgent need of using the plough of the law before they attempt to sow the seed of the Gospel. It is of no avail to keep on saying to people "Believe on Christ" until you have employed that Scriptural material which the Spirit can use to convict souls of their awful need of Christ. We turn now to consider, very briefly, the appropriation of the Atonement, or the sinner's own act in becoming a personal partaker of the saving virtues of Christ's satisfaction. As we showed in our last chapter, the Gospel is addressed to human responsibility: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). The business of God's servants is to preach and press the righteous demands of the Divine law, to call upon sinners to repent of their transgressions and turn from their wicked ways; to present Christ as a Savior from the curse of the law, and bid their hearers lay down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and receive Him as their Lord and Savior. Not until Christ is cordially received as Prophet, Priest and King, is forgiveness of sins to be obtained. As Prophet, to reveal to us the righteousness and grace of God. As Priest, who offered a sacrifice, the blood of which is sufficient to cleanse the foulest who trusts in it. As King, to rule over us. The object or design in our first coming to Christ is to be saved by Him, to be saved from self, to be delivered from rebelling against God. He is the great Physician, and can allay the fever and cleanse the leprosy, of sin. He who comes to Christ without a disposition to be reconciled to God, is only seeking deliverance from Hell, and does not desire that salvation which the Gospel proclaims, namely, deliverance from the power and condemnation of sin. Saving faith implies in its very nature both repentance and conversion, or a "turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). A mediator must be accepted by both parties that are at variance, and each must stand to what He doth. God has declared Himself fully satisfied; it rests now with the individual sinner to also give the assent of his heart to Christ's dying in the stead of the ungodly and rest upon the sufficiency of His sacrifice. Saving faith is that act of the soul whereby one who is hopeless, helpless and lost in himself, does in a way of expectancy and trust seek for all help and relief in Christ alone. Faith is a going out of ourselves unto God in Christ, finding in Him all that we need for time and eternity. Faith is the one link between the sinner and the Sin-bearer. Faith is a receiving into our hearts the testimony of God concerning His Son, and a setting to our seal that He is true (John 3:33). Should these lines be read by a sin-burdened soul, distressed by the plague of his own heart, and fearful that he or she has sinned beyond the hope of Divine pardon, we would point you to Him who is "mighty to save." Christ died not for righteous people, but for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6). He came here to save the lost (Luke 19:10). His promise is, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25). Then look away from your ruined self, fly to Christ for refuge, trust in His precious blood and He will save you with an everlasting salvation.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/aw-pink/the-satisfaction-of-christ-studies-in-the-atonement-23-its-reception/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net