

The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 24. Its Rejection

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Transcript

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All the race of Adam are guilty before God, and, consequently, none of them can by any works of their own find acceptance with Him. Almost every page of Scripture bears testimony to this truth. The whole scheme of revelation takes it for granted. The plan of salvation taught in the Word could have no place on any other supposition. The Son of man came here to save that which was lost. Were we not exposed to danger, there could be no salvation. When the Lord Jesus called Paul and sent him forth to preach to men, it was "to open their eyes," and "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). Here we have the character of the whole Gentile world: they are as ignorant of the true character of God and of the way of acceptance with Him, as blind men are ignorant of the real nature of the objects of sight. They walk, "In the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:17,18). That the world is guilty before God, is not only declared by Scripture, but is also to be seen by the present state of man with regard to happiness. It is obvious to any impartial observer that the human race is miserable, even amidst its mirth and dissipation. Men are seeking happiness (a proof that they do not have it) from the enjoyment of earthly things, according to their various tastes and appetites; but they find it not. From the highest to the lowest, there is that which mars their peace and enjoyment. The very things which the poor regard as evidences of the happiness of the rich, are but so many devices to drive away sorrow. If they would honestly express themselves, the millionaire in his mansion and the king on his throne would declare, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." True happiness is to be found in God alone. In such a state of guilt and misery is placed the whole human race. It is indeed a melancholy truth, but one which is altogether incontestible. Instead, then, of disputing the Divine testimony, let us inquire from the same authority, whether there be any way of escape. Is the fate of fallen men as hopeless as that of fallen angels? No, blessed be God, it is not. The same Word of Truth which tells of man's ruin, announces the Divine remedy; the same Book which describes human guilt and wretchedness, tells of a way of deliverance therefrom. The One, who, in the exercise of His high sovereignty, reserved the sinning angels in everlasting chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day, has, in His abounding mercy, provided salvation for undone sinners of Adam's race. The Divine way of salvation is the most stupendous monument of Divine wisdom and grace, of sovereignty and power, of justice and mercy, that ever was exhibited in this world. God has provided a Savior, who, by His virtuous life and vicarious death, has made atonement for sin, by which all His people obtain eternal life. The whole

scope of revelation, from the first intimation made in Eden (Gen. 3:15) to the end of the New Testament, bears witness to this marvelous and precious way of salvation. The Divine promises declared it, the types illustrated it, the prophets foretold it. When the Son of man was here, He announced that He "came to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28): almost everyone knows that a "ransom" is a price paid for the recovery of anything that is lost to its original owner. The uniform teaching of the Epistles is, that "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners." The Scriptures are both full and clear in making known the way in which guilty sinners are interested in the atonement of Christ. "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith" (Rom. 3:22-27). In this passage the apostle not only establishes the guilt of man and the atonement of Christ, but also clearly asserts that faith is the medium through which sinners are interested in the work of Christ. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). Can any thing be more explicit? Can any thing be more directly to the point? Salvation must be given gratuitously, that no flesh may glory in God's presence. The "reward" of the man that "worketh," the apostle says, is not of "grace," but of "debt." It therefore follows that works of no kind whatever can give a title to the atonement of Christ or the favor of God. But let it be said with emphasis that a saving reception of Christ's atonement is by such a faith which effectually changes the heart and the mind, so that the desires and pursuits of its recipient are entirely different than formerly. There has ever been a need to press this fact, for the enemies of the Gospel charge it as unfriendly to good works. But in these terrible days, when multitudes who profess to be saved by grace through the redemption of Christ, are giving the lie to their profession by continuing in a course of self-will and self-indulgence, the need for making clear this fact is doubly evident. Saving faith is that which "purifieth the heart" (Acts 15:9). "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Formerly, the Christian sought for happiness in the pleasures, honors, or riches of this world; now he seeks it in those things which are above. He abhors the things in which he once delighted, and delights in what he once abhorred. "For I delight in the law of God" says the apostle, "after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). Many things in the commandments of Jesus Christ are so disagreeable to flesh and blood, that they are (figuratively) called the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye: yet the Christian not only acquiesces, but finds pleasure in yielding obedience to Christ in such things. True, he still has a corrupt nature to struggle against, yet his delight is decidedly in the law of his God. Saving faith is that which "overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4). But we must now make a closer approach to our immediate theme. The proclamation of mercy through the atonement of the incarnate Son of God is called the Gospel, or good news, because it announces deliverance from condemnation and eternal life to every believer. But it also necessarily implies and plainly denounces tidings of a very opposite nature to all who reject it, and in general to all the workers of iniquity. If it proclaims life to those who receive it, then death must be the portion of all who neglect it. This solemn fact is made prominent throughout the New Testament in the most awful and striking manner. Many are sheltering behind a profession of Christianity, and fondly hope that there is a sort of general impunity in sin on account of the death of Christ; but all such are fatally deluded, for the Gospel denounces wrath against all who do not receive it, and against all evil-doers. In the great commission which our Lord gave first to His apostles, He asserted as expressly that they who believed the Gospel shall be saved, as that they who believed it not shall be damned (Mark

16:16). What the Gospel is was shown in our last chapter, and Galatians 1:8 announces that any deviation from that Gospel, any substitution of another brings down the curse of Heaven upon the one who proclaims it, and by parity of reason, on those who accept it. What would be thought of this by those who pride themselves on their liberality of sentiment? who make the belief or rejection of the Truth a matter of trifling consideration? Here is the Truth, God's Truth: the rejection of the Gospel means the perdition in Hell of both soul and body forever. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. . . for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. . . for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:16-18). If the whole of these three verses be read attentively, it will be seen that the Gospel contains both a revelation of the "righteousness" of God and also of His "wrath." In like manner, the same chapter which tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), also declares, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (v. 36). The condemnation of all who are ignorant of the, true God and who reject the Gospel of Christ, is made known in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, "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 of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." This language is so terrible and decisive that nothing but the blindness and hardness of a depraved heart could defy it. To know God and receive His Son is "eternal life" (John 17:3), but to be ignorant of the true character of God and reject His Gospel entails eternal damnation. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward: How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation" (Heb. 2:1-3). Let those who trifle with their souls and refuse to seriously attend unto the Gospel, learn from this that God is in earnest in what He declares in the Scriptures. It seems incredible that people can hear and read unmoved the awful denunciations which the Word of Truth hurls against them. They surely cannot believe that such threatenings proceed from Him who cannot lie. Too late shall they discover that every word in them shall be faithfully executed. Perhaps some are inclined to ask at this point, How can God justly punish men for rejecting a Savior who never died for them? Many have regarded this as an insoluble problem; yet it is capable of a simple solution. First, let us duly attend to the plain and solemn declaration of Christ Himself: "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Nothing could be plainer than that: if any find it difficult to fit that verse into their theology, then something is wrong with their theology — Christ is "despised and rejected of men." It is quite true that every man lies under the condemnation of God before the Gospel first comes to him: the judgment for Adam's offense rests upon him (Rom. 5:12-19), to which is added the guilt of his own transgressions. But it is also true that additional guilt and condemnation comes to those who spurn the advances of Divine mercy made unto them through the Gospel. There are degrees of criminality, as there will be of punishment. Clear proof is furnished in those solemn words of Christ's: "And thou Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell. . . It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matthew 11:23,24). So too, more tolerable shall it be in the Day of Judgment for the unevangelized section of Heathendom, than it will for multitudes in Christendom who refuse to obey the Gospel. Christendom's sins are going to be punished (the more severely) for having scorned that glad tidings which was "worthy of (entitled to) all acceptance." And let us emphasize once more the fact that the Gospel message is not that Christ died for me,, but that He died for sinners. The Gospel is addressed to human responsibility, and

presents a Savior who is ready to save all who will comply with its terms. If men will not come to Christ that they "might have life" (John 5:40), then their blood is upon their own heads. Therefore will God yet say to them, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then they shall call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord" (Prov. 1:24-29). The preaching of the Gospel unto men at large becomes a searching test of their state of heart. It ought to have a powerful influence upon them in breaking their hearts on account of sin. Why did the Son of God leave His heavenly glory and enter a life of unspeakable humiliation here on earth? Why did He suffer such frightful indignities at the hands of men, so that His face was spat upon, His hair plucked out, His back scourged? Why was He nailed to the Cross of woe, where His life's blood was poured out? The answer is, for sin. And can that be thought upon with any seriousness, and the heart not be broken before God? What will melt the hard heart of man and thaw it into godly sorrow for sin, if the contemplation of Christ's sacrifice will not do it? O my readers, the shedding of the precious blood of Immanuel ought surely to melt the most adamant heart that is yet out of Hell. Would men but ponder the Savior's passion, both in the character and degree of it, viewing its bitter ingredients and heightened circumstances, and then also consider that it was human transgressions which brought Him to Calvary, surely they would be far more deeply affected for sin than they now are. It is written, "they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" and what follows? This: "and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him" (Zech. 12:10). Ah, that is true penitence — a broken heart from viewing the broken body of Christ. What then must be the state, and what must be the punishment, of them concerning whom the Savior has to ask, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" (Lam. 1:12). Again; the proclamation of the Gospel and the serious consideration of the Savior's sufferings ought to have a powerful effect in turning men from sin. Behold, my reader, the Lord of glory dying as a sacrifice, making His soul "an offering for sin" (Isa. 53:10). Will you deliberately elect to continue living in that for which the Son of God died? Will you regard as a "sweet morsel" that which was more bitter than gall to the Beloved of the Father? God Himself condemned sin at the Cross (Rom. 8:3). Dare you, then, approve of it? O will you not condemn it too, repudiate it, turn from it in loathing, and seek grace from above to have nothing more to do with it? When you are tempted to sin, recall the bleeding wounds of the suffering Savior. Nothing is more calculated to slay our love for sin than a contemplation of the awful wages which it paid to the Redeemer. O what an indescribably dreadful state must they be in (as the writer and the Christian reader once were!) who turn a deaf ear to God's call through the Gospel, and in so doing "despise and reject" His Son! What a dreadful and unmistakable evidence is this that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7)! Ah, that explains why it is that all men "make excuse" (Luke 14:18) when they are bid to come to the rich feast that Divine mercy has spread. It is not carelessness or indifference; no, the real root of the trouble lies much deeper: it is a desperately wicked heart (Jer. 17:9) which is opposed to the thrice holy God, that is the source of impenitence and unbelief. Men prefer material and temporal things to spiritual and eternal ones, the "pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25), rather than those "pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11) which are at God's right hand. What has just been said above is no theoretical reasoning of ours, but the plain teaching of Christ Himself. After He had so solemnly declared, "he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18), He at once (by way of explanation) added, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every

one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved" (vv. 19,20). No matter what (seemingly) plausible "excuses" men and women may make for their present rejection of the Gospel, He who cannot err insists that behind those excuses is a love of darkness (sin) and a hatred of the Light! Let men say what they will with respect to their rejection of the Gospel, all their objections are founded in their disaffection to truth and holiness. They may claim to respect and believe God's Word, and that they want to be saved, or profess they are saved, but in truth they "hate the light because their deeds are evil." They will not part with their idols. They will not forsake that pleasant but Broad Road which leadeth to destruction. They will not deny "self," and submit to Christ as their Lord. They are willing to be saved their own way, but not God's. They wish to serve two masters, and make the best of both worlds. They may be good members of society, and be virtuous and pious, but the real language of their hearts is "we will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). When people are told that they despise as well as "reject" Christ, they feel the charge is not true of them. When it is insisted upon that they hate Christ (John 15:18), they suppose the indictment is far too severe. Nay, they imagine they have a high estimate of Christ, that they sincerely own Him to be the most excellent One that has ever walked this earth, and that they are earnestly desirous of being saved by Him. But a "deceived heart has turned them aside" (Isa. 44:20). Had the Jewish nation been told one year before Christ began His public ministry that they would not only scorn Him, but put Him to death, would not they have indignantly denied such a charge? Most assuredly, they would. They would have answered: All our hopes center in Him, we are eagerly awaiting His promised advent, and shall gladly receive Him the moment He appears. And in so speaking, they would have been perfectly sincere. Yet God's infallible Word declares that Christ was the one "whom the nation abhorreth" (Isa. 49:7). And why did they? Because when He stood before them, He was different from what they expected. Ah, my reader, in what has just been said above, we have the Divine explanation to the solemn situation which is confronting us today. History has repeated itself. The Jews would have willingly received a Messiah patterned after their own carnal desires. Had Christ presented Himself only as a Deliverer from their temporal troubles, gratified their fleshly lusts, and not interfered with their selfish plans, He had received a royal welcome from them. But for the Holy One of God they had no heart. For One who required repentance, for One who came to save them from the present dominion of sin, for One who demanded unqualified submission to God's will, for One who must be received as Lord and Master, they had no love. To forsake all and follow Him, suited them not. To abandon their idols, mortify the flesh, and enter the path of obedience to His commands and precepts, was altogether foreign to their every thought and desire. And is it any different today? Not a whit. Present to men One who was filled with compassion for the suffering, who ministered to the needy, fed the poor, healed the sick, and, as a public Benefactor and Philanthropist, He is universally admired. Or, proclaim Him as a Deliverer from the wrath to come, as One who is willing to save from Hell and take to Heaven, and the movings of self-interest will induce multitudes to welcome Him as such. But, my reader, the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be halved in any such manner as this. He must be received just as He is, a whole Christ as the Scriptures present Him to us. As a Prophet to reveal God's will, and that, in order for us to walk therein. As a Priest to mediate, offering Himself as a sacrifice to God, presenting our sacrifices of praise to Him. As a King to occupy the throne of our hearts, to rule us by His precepts, to subdue our enemies. But as such the unregenerate see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. Thousands of professing Christians are willing to believe in Christ for salvation, but not to conform to Him in obedience. They desire the "rest" which He gives, but not His "yoke" — just as of old the multitudes sought Him for the loaves and fishes, yet had no heart for His searching teachings. People want the justification which the Gospel proclaims, but not the mortification of the old man which it enjoins. But this cannot be. In order to "come" to Christ, the sinner must turn from sin and all else that competes for his heart. The truth is that the

vast majority of those now bearing His name love their worldly and fleshly lusts far more than they do Christ. "Thus it is now with the carnal professors of the Gospel: because Christ answers not their expectation, they entertain prejudice against Him as represented in the Gospel, and are unwilling to come to Him. They want a Savior that will let them live quietly in their sins, be indulgent to them in their fleshly courses, and yet bring them to heaven when they can live in sin no longer. But when the Gospel represents Christ as One who requires strictness and holiness in all of His followers, who calls for separation from the world in all that come to Him, who tells them they must suffer any evil rather than sin, and take up the cross if they will have Him for their Christ; when the Gospel offers One whom nothing will please but that holiness and strictness which the world derides; One whom persecutions and reproaches will attend all His followers; then prejudice seizes on their souls. Thus we see why so many will not come to Christ, and who they are" (D. Clarkson, 1680). And "what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17). What can it be? What must be the portion of those who love darkness and hate the Light? Only one answer is possible. And Scripture does not leave us in ignorance thereof. "If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from Heaven" (Heb. 12:25). Escape they shall not. The Angel that hath a rainbow about His head, hath pillars of fire for His feet (Rev. 10:1) to consume them who refuse His peace. "He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). And in that Day He shall say, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before me" (Luke 19:27). Oh, my reader, if you value your soul at all, weigh thoroughly what has just been before you. Pass it not on to some one else, but take it home to thyself. Christ cannot be imposed upon, and soon it will be too late to undeceive yourself. "A diabolical life and a believing heart are contradictions. No man can with any reason lay claim to a faith in Christ who prefers the pleasures of the world before the sweetness of a Redeemer, that which is an offense to Him before that which is His delight. How can they believe in Christ that are carried down with the violent current of their own lusts, and regard not one tittle of His law? If faith be full of good works, then the lack of such clearly implies the absence of faith" (S. Charnock, 1680). May the Lord deign to add His blessing to these pages for His name's sake.

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