

The Need of Atonement

by Catherine Booth

Catherine Booth's sermon emphasizes the necessity of atonement for moral restoration and reconciliation with God through Christ's sacrifice.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Romans 3:26, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:20, Hebrews 9:14, Hebrews 10:10, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Atonement", "Salvation"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the necessity of atonement in the Gospel scheme, emphasizing the importance of God vindicating His law before pardoning sinners. She explains how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ meets the deepest needs of humanity, addressing the universal consciousness of moral wrong and the innate desire for justice and atonement. Catherine highlights the significance of accepting and appropriating the atonement of Christ to pacify the conscience, restore harmony with God, and experience the peace of God's forgiveness.

Transcript

ROMANS iii. 26.-`That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth. in Jesus.'

WE spoke, last Thursday night, especially on the misunderstanding of the scheme of redemption, as having been the cause of the indifference of a great many (especially intelligent people) to the subject of religion; that false and contradictory theories thrust upon them had shocked and insulted their reason, and repelled them from the subject altogether.

We remarked that if the Gospel had been put in a straightforward, manly way, many would have been led to examine it, and that would have ultimately led to their Salvation; but that it had been put in such contradictory ways, so repugnant to the common sense and conscience of mankind, especially with respect to the character of God, that numbers had rejected it: and that it was presented as a weak, effeminate thing--all the masculine side gone out of it.

We said all would be agreed on one point; namely, that men have generally the consciousness of being morally wrong. Amongst the numbers I have spoken to personally, during these last twenty years, on the concerns of their souls, I do not remember more than five or six that have maintained that they were perfectly right. Unregenerate people `KNOW they are wrong, and admit it. They say, `I know I am not what I ought to be, or what I might be.' There is a universal consciousness that we are gone away from the

straight line of rectitude which every man's conscience tells him he ought to walk by.

We said that God's scheme of redemption recognized this fact, and that it came to us, meeting us just where we stood, as fallen, free moral agents; that God had not ignored this fact--had not put a scheme before us which was not adapted to our present circumstances had not required of us what was impossible to render in our present circumstances; but that the scheme of redemption was a scheme adapted to us in the moral condition in which it found us.

We remarked, further, that God did not require to make any change in the make of us. A scheme of theology has been thrust upon mankind which implies that God must alter human nature in order to save it. I do not mean altering it in its moral quality--making it righteous instead of sinful--but altering its constitution, saving us not as men and women, having all the capacities, propensities, and affections of humanity; that we must, so to speak, be reorganized before God can save us. If I understand the Gospel, it makes no such assumption, and comes to us with no such requirements. It was HUMANITY THAT FELL, and it was HUMANITY that needed to be restored. It was MAN who fell, and God proposes to restore MAN.

We went on to remark, that this scheme of redemption proposes to do just what we need; namely, TO PUT US RIGHT AGAIN. It is an indispensable condition of a moral agent's being happy, that he should be RIGHT. If we could be transplanted before the throne of God, retaining a sense of wrong in ourselves, feeling that we were out of harmony with the laws of the universe, and with the mind and will of God, we should be as miserable as we should be in Hell, because it is not the surroundings that make people happy, but the state of their hearts; and I fancy we should feel worse in the insufferable light of the Gloryland, with a sense of moral impurity, than we should in the darkness of Hell itself.

What a misunderstanding of the Gospel scheme there is at this point! How people separate what God does for us outwardly through the sacrifice of His Son from what He does for us inwardly by the operation of His Spirit! and, therefore, there is a notion abroad of a sort of make-believe religion, as though God would count us righteous, and deal with us as if we were righteous, while He leaves us unrighteous. We tried last week to show that God would, in the first instance, JUSTIFY US as unrighteous people, but that, at the same time, He would put His Holy Spirit within us, and `RENEW us in the spirit of our minds'--in short, transform us from sinners into saints.

Now, we want to show how the Gospel does this.

How does the Gospel thus restore us to harmony with ourselves, harmony with moral law, and harmony with God? As God does everything--by adapting the means to the end--by adapting the Gospel to our needs. God, as it were, comes to me, a guilty, fallen, moral agent, and says, `I want to pardon you, to bring you back again, not only to what you were before, but a great deal in advance of that. I want to save you; but there is one thing indispensably necessary before I can do this, and that is, that I shall maintain the dignity and the righteousness of My law--I must vindicate the law which you have broken before I can pardon you.'

It is self-evident that before God can pardon and restore the sinner, He must vindicate His own law, that this was necessary in THE NATURE OF THE CASE. I think persons often forget this when they talk about God not requiring an atonement, as though it were a mere personal matter with God. They regard it as though it were an arbitrary arrangement on His part; they do not look at the nature of the case; they do not look at the surroundings, at all the issues, or they would not think that God could set at naught His law. To

pardon the transgressor at the expense of righteousness would be a greater loss than gain.

Take an illustration from human affairs. Here is a man who commits some serious breach of the law of this land. Now, there are two things to be considered. The value of law consists in its sanctity in the minds of those who are under it, and in breaking the law there is a violation, an outrage committed against the conscience of every being in this kingdom who respects and holds the law to be sacred. Here is a man who commits a diabolical murder. What is the feeling of the whole country? Every human being who has come to the age of reason cries out for an atonement. Something penal must be exacted, suitable to the magnitude of the offence; you cannot pacify the public conscience without it. To pardon that transgressor, without any atonement for the violation of the law, would outrage universal conscience further than the crime itself. The conscience of every man and woman says that law must be appeased, vindicated, held up. Why? First, as a satisfaction to the sense of justice which has been outraged; and, secondly, as a safeguard that others shall not transgress. When the law ceases to have penalties, it ceases to be law, and becomes merely good advice, or counsel. The very idea of law implies some penal consequences if it be broken, and it ceases to be law when that idea goes out.

Now, if God were to sustain any government at all in the universe, He must necessarily have a law; it could not be sustained otherwise; and from all we know of the character of God, of the workings of God, in nature, how He loves law, and how law-abiding He is in all His operations judging from all this, there is no doubt that the one great moral law which He has written on the tables of our hearts, written in His Book and in His Gospel, operates in Heaven, and everywhere else where He reigns--it is the great moral law of the universe.

One of God's creatures breaks it; what is to be done? Satan broke it, and God has let him reap the penalty of his transgression.

But now man transgresses, and God wants to save man. Why God wanted to save man in preference to angels, I suppose, we shall remain in the dark about in this world; but, depend upon it, He had a reason, and a good one. Thank His Name that He wanted to save us. But law was broken, and what was to be done? Our sense of right had been shocked and grieved, and we could not pronounce it righteous if God should pardon the transgressor without some amends being made to the law. We could never make ourselves feel it to be right, any more than you could feel it to be right for Queen Victoria to pardon that murderer without satisfaction being rendered to the law of this kingdom. You would say, 'Monstrous injustice! If this is going to be done, we shall not be safe in our beds. There must be something done to magnify and hold up that law in the estimation of the people, or else we might as well have no law.' And just so with the moral law. If God had pardoned the transgressor without an atonement, I say, then there would have ceased to be law, and you could not have pacified the outraged consciences of moral beings, in any part of the universe to whom the fact should be known; and universal anarchy, confusion, and rebellion might have ensued!

Then what was to be done? The law had been broken, and yet God wanted to save the offender. We answer, the law must have compensation, or the universe must be without law. God must have an atonement which will not only satisfy His justice, but that will appease and satisfy the outraged consciences of all moral beings.

He must have something that the angels will say, 'Yes, that is enough.' He must have something that the devils will say, 'Yes, we can say nothing against that'; and He must have something that the universal

human conscience can appropriate as being SUFFICIENT to justify God in pardoning the guilty.

Now, who was there who could have offered such atonement? Man could not offer a ransom for his brother. I question if there is, in the eyes of God, any more valuable being in the universe than man. I do not know whether the angels are more valuable, in the scale of being, than man; the probability seems to be the other way. God created man in His own image. Man seems to have been the darling of the Deity. His delights were with him, and the whole universe sang together at his creation, and God has manifested His extraordinary love for man by redeeming him, while He has left the angels that fell to perish.

But, supposing angels to be more valuable than man. They were only finite, created beings, whereas the law which had been broken was infinite and eternal, involving infinite and eternal consequences. Therefore, they were incapable of rendering an equivalent. `If there had been another being in the universe capable of offering an atonement, doubtless God would have `spared His own Son'; but there was not, and therefore God spared Him not, but allowed Him to undertake the work, and the Son voluntarily gave Himself a sacrifice for us, that He might redeem us from the curse of the law.

Now, when we come to look into this question of atonement, does it look as unlikely and unreasonable as some people try to make out?

I acknowledge the stupendous character of the sacrifice. I acknowledge the wonderful stoop it was of the Divine Son to undertake it. I think I appreciate His love and goodness as much as any; but I feel as if, after all, we can understand a little about it. We can see how natural it was, that if the Father and the Son had created this favourite being, man, and had set Their hearts on him, as They evidently had, and if Satan had thought to circumvent them by tempting man from his allegiance, and working his eternal ruin--it seems no such unlikely or unreasonable thing that, as the Deity held council and united to create men, so the Deity, foreseeing `his fall, should hold council and unite to redeem him; and, as no other being was found equal to the necessity of the case that the Divine Son should undertake it, rather than this race which He had created should be lost, and Satan allowed to triumph in having circumvented the Divine purpose concerning it.

But it is more particularly on the manward side that I am looking at the atonement tonight. Take one illustration of the necessity of a sacrifice valuable enough to appease conscience. It is a remarkable fact, and what every one who has worked in the Lord's vineyard knows, that it is the very last thing you can get a sinner to do, to venture on the atonement, great as it is. When the Holy Ghost has opened the sinner's eyes to the enormity of sin, quickened his conscience to perceive his condition before God, it is only by the most persistent exhibition of the greatness and sufficiency of the atonement that you can get his conscience to take hold of it, and appropriate, and be pacified by it.

Oh, how wonderfully has God guarded the sanctity of His law by putting human conscience on its side! Such an awful thing does it look to the awakened conscience that the law has been broken, that it is the very last thing you can do to get the sinner to accept even THE SON OF GOD as a sufficient atonement. I have often said, as a last resort, to sinners writhing in the agony of conviction, and groaning under a retrospect of their lives, and an apprehension of the consequences which their guilt has entailed,

Was not the sacrifice enough?' when they have said, `Oh, you don't know how guilty--you don't know how bad I have been; I do not believe anybody was ever as bad as I have been.' I grant it all; but was not the sacrifice sufficient? Do you ever stop to think WHO WAS THE SUFFERER? He was the Son of God! Is not that enough?

I said to a lady, only a few days ago, 'If God accepted the sacrifice as enough to atone for your sins, and to justify, and vindicate His law, will you not accept it? Will you not take the broken, bleeding body of your Saviour, as it were, and look up into the face of God, and say, 'It is enough, Lord! He suffered enough to atone, even for my sin!' Oh, it is a blessed thing when the sinner comes to that; when the Holy Spirit exhibits before him the greatness and sufficiency of the atonement, so that he accepts it, and rests upon it; then conscience is satisfied, and the peace of God fills the soul. Account for it how you will, there is a fear in the human conscience that, somehow or other, it is not SAFE for God to pardon offenders. Conscience cannot feel that He may do it consistently, with His relation as God, and we have to get conscience to comprehend that the Son has paid the ransom before the soul will venture on it. The blood of bulls and goats, the blood of men or angels, would not have met the case!

Then we can see the absolute necessity for an atonement. Who, with any due estimate of his guilt, dare presume on the pardon of God without one? You may think you dare; but, my friend, when your eyes are opened to the importance and sanctity of the Divine law, your conscience will cry out for a sacrifice. Hence, no matter how advanced in Holiness, every dying saint rests his soul on the blood of Christ. Millions have died, ignoring every other claim or plea but the blood! And in all cases of the conversion of infidels or atheists, no matter how violent has been their opposition to the doctrine of a vicarious sacrifice, they are compelled to take refuge under the Cross, and in no other way can their consciences find rest or peace! Conscience must have the assurance that God can be JUST, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. This necessity lies deep down in our own nature; even the heathen feel it, on whom revelation has never dawned; hence they offer the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul, and inflict on themselves unheard-of tortures and cruelties. They feel that they are transgressors, and that they need something wherewith to appease justice, and so they try to make atonement for themselves. This necessity is so universal in man that those systems of religion which have not recognized and met it have made but little headway in the world, and must ultimately, with all others which fail to meet the innate crying needs of the soul, dwindle and die.

Sinner, the sacrifice of Christ meets your deepest need. God has not blinked the fact of your uttermost guilt. He has looked the subject all round, and met the whole case by letting His Son, the eternal Word, offer a sacrifice which Heaven, earth, and Hell pronounce to be enough! Now you may safely venture your guilty soul on the virtue of that Blood; and the Divine benevolence can consistently run to meet you at the Cross! 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.' Will you come and meet Him in His own appointed method? Once more I beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. Lay down your weapons of rebellion; give up your suspicion and mistrust; accept the offering which your Father has accepted for you, and be at one with Him. The Lord help you! Amen.

Think, O Jesus, for what reason Thou enduredst earth's spite and treason, Nor me lose in that dread season.

Seeking me Thy worn feet hastened; On the cross Thy soul death tasted; Let not all Thy toils be wasted.

Look from Heaven, Thy glorious mansion, See me weep in deep contrition, Weep and yield in full submission.

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