

Jesus Only

by Horatius Bonar

Satisfaction with Christ is what God expects of us, not satisfaction with our own faith, love, or repentance.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 1:18, Matthew 11:28, Luke 19:10, John 3:16, Romans 5:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Grace", "Satisfaction in Christ"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes that seeking Christ, even from selfish motives such as fear of wrath or desire for salvation, is not wrong. He argues that God created us with these instincts and expects us to respond to His appeals. Bonar reassures that true faith is being satisfied with Christ and His work, rather than with our own feelings or motives. He encourages believers to come to Christ as they are, acknowledging their imperfections, and to trust in His grace rather than their own righteousness. Ultimately, Bonar highlights that God's love and compassion for sinners is unwavering, urging them to accept His invitation to salvation.

Transcript

You say, "I am not satisfied with the motives that have led me to seek Christ; they are selfish." That is very likely. The feelings of a newly awakened sinner are not disinterested, neither can they be so.

You have gone in quest of salvation from a sense of danger, or fear of the wrath to come, or a desire to obtain the inheritance of glory. These are some of the motives by which you are actuated.

How could it be otherwise? God made you with these fears and hopes; and he appeals to them in his word. When he says, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" he is appealing to your fears. When he sets eternal life before you, and the joys of an endless kingdom, he is appealing to your hopes. And when he presents these motives, he expects you to be moved by them. To act upon such motives, then, cannot be wrong. Nay, not to act upon them, would be to harden yourself against God's most solemn appeals. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," says Paul. It cannot be wrong to be influenced by this terror. "The remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven." This surely was not wrong. The whole Bible is full of such motives, addressed to our hopes and fears.

When was it otherwise? Among all the millions who have found life in Christ, who began in any other way, or from any higher motive? Was it not thus that the jailor began when the earthquake shook his soul, and called up before his conscience the everlasting woe? Was it not a sense of danger and a dread of wrath

that made him ask, "What shall I do to be saved?" And did the apostle rebuke him for this? Did he refuse to answer his anxious question, because his motive was so selfish? No. He answered at once, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

There is nothing wrong in these motives. When my body is pained, it is not wrong to wish for relief. When overtaken by sickness, it is not wrong to send for the physician. You may call this selfishness, which He who made us what we are, and who gave us these instincts, expects us to act upon; and in acting on which, we may count upon his blessing, not his rebuke. It is not wrong to dread hell, to desire heaven, to flee from torments, to long for blessedness, to shun condemnation, and to desire pardon.[26] Let not Satan then ensnare you with such foolish thoughts, the tendency of which is to quench every serious desire, under the pretext of its not being disinterested and perfect.

You think that, were you seeking salvation from a regard to the glory of God, you would be satisfied. But what does that mean, but that, at the very first, even before you have come to Christ, you are to be actuated by the highest of all motives? He who has learned to seek God's glory is one who has already come to Christ; and he who has learned to do this entirely, is no sinner at all, and, therefore, does not need Christ. To seek God's glory is a high attainment of faith; yet you want to be conscious of possessing it before you have got faith, - nay, in order to your getting it! Is it possible that you can be deluding yourself with the idea that if you could only secure this qualification, you might confidently expect God to give you faith. This would be substituting your own zeal for his glory, in the room of the cross of Christ.

Do not keep back from Christ under the idea that you must come to him in a disinterested frame, and from an unselfish motive. If you were right in this thing, who could be saved? You are to come as you are; with all your bad motives, whatever these may be. Take all your bad motives, add them to the number of your sins, and bring them all to the altar where the great sacrifice is lying. Go to the mercy seat. Tell the High Priest there, not what you desire to be, nor what you ought to be, but what you are. Tell him the honest truth as to your condition at this moment. Confess the impurity of your motives; all the evil that you feel or that you don't feel; your hard-heartedness, your blindness, your unteachableness. Confess everything without reserve. He wants you to come to Him exactly as you are, and not to cherish the vain thought that, by a little waiting, or working, or praying, you can make yourself fit, or persuade Him to make you fit.[27]

"But I am not satisfied with my faith," you say. No truly. Nor are you ever likely to be so. At least I should hope not. If you wait for this before you take peace, you will wait till life is done. It would appear that you want to believe in your own faith, in order to obtain rest to your soul. The Bible does not say, "Being satisfied about our faith, we have peace with God," but "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God;" and between these two things there is a wonderful difference. Satisfaction with Jesus and his work, not satisfaction with your own faith, is what God expects of you. "I am satisfied with Christ," you say. Are you? Then you are a believing man; and what more do you wish? Is not satisfaction with Christ enough for you or for any sinner? Nay, and is not this the truest kind of faith? To be satisfied with Christ, is faith in Christ. To be satisfied with his blood, is faith in his blood. Do not bewilder yourself, or allow others to bewilder you. Be assured that the very essence of faith is being satisfied with Christ and his sinbearing work; ask no more questions about faith, but go upon your way rejoicing, as one to whom Christ is all.

Remember, the Baptist's words, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Self, in every form, must decrease, and Christ must increase. To become satisfied with your faith would look as if you were dissatisfied with Christ. The beginning, the middle, and end of your course must be dissatisfaction with self, and satisfaction with Christ. Be content to be satisfied with faith's glorious object, and let faith itself be

forgotten. Faith, however perfect, has nothing to give you. It points you to Jesus. It bids you look away from itself to Him. It bids you look away from itself to Him. It says, "Christ is all." It bids you look to him who says, "Look upon me;" who says, "Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore."

If you were required to believe in your own faith, to ascertain its quality, and to know that you are born again before you were warranted to trust in Jesus, or to have peace, you would certainly need to be satisfied with your own faith. But you are not required to make good any personal claim, save that you are a sinner; not that you feel yourself to be one, (that would open up an endless metaphysical inquiry into your own feelings,) but simply that you are one. This you know upon God's authority, and learn from his word; and on this you act whether you feel your sinfulness or not. The gospel needs no ascertaining of anything about ourselves, save what is written in the Bible, and what is common to all Adam's children, - that we need a Saviour. It is upon this need that faith acts; it is this need that faith presents at the throne of grace. The question, then, is not, Am I satisfied with my faith? but, Am I a needy sinner, and am I satisfied that in Christ there is all I need?

You say, "I am not satisfied with my love." What! Did you expect to be so? Is it your love to Christ, or his love to you, that is to bring you peace? God's free love to sinners, as such, is our resting place. There are two kinds of love in God, - his love of compassion to the unbelieving sinner, and his love of delight and complacency to his believing children. A father's love to a prodigal child is quite as sincere as his love to his obedient, loving child at home, though it be a different kind. God cannot love you as a believer till you are such. But he loves you as a poor sinner. And it is this love of his to the unloving and unlovable that affords the sinner his first resting place. This free love of God satisfies and attracts him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." "We love him because he first loved us." "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

"I am not satisfied with my repentance," you say. It is well. What should you have thought of yourself had you been so? What pride and self-righteousness would it indicate, were you saying, "I am satisfied with my repentance, - it is of the proper quality and amount." If satisfied with it, what would you do with it? Would you ground your peace upon it? Would you pacify your conscience with it? Would you go with it instead of the blood to a holy God? If not, what do you mean by the desire to be satisfied with your repentance before having peace with God?

In short, you are not satisfied with any of your religious feelings; and it is well that you are not; for, if you were, you must have a very high idea of yourself, and a very low idea of what both law and gospel expect of you. You are, I doubt not, right in not being satisfied with the state of your feelings; but what has this to do with the great duty of immediately believing on the Son of God? If the gospel is nothing to you till you have got your feelings all set right, it is no gospel for the sinner at all. But this is its special fitness and glory, that it takes you up at the very point where you are at this moment, and brings you glad tidings in spite of your feelings being altogether wrong.

All these difficulties of yours have their root in the self esteem of our natures, which makes us refuse to be counted altogether sinners, and which shrinks from going to God save with some personal recommendation to make acceptance likely. Utter want of goodness is what we are slow to acknowledge. Give up these attempts to be satisfied with yourself in anything, great or small, faith, feeling, or action. The Holy Spirit's work in convincing you of sin, is to make you dissatisfied with yourself; and will you pursue a course which can only grieve him away? God can never be satisfied with you on account of any goodness

about you; and why should you attempt to be satisfied with anything which will not satisfy him? There is but one thing with which he is entirely satisfied, - the person and work of his only begotten Son. It is with Him that he wants you to be satisfied, not with yourself. How much better would it be to take God's way at once, and be satisfied with Christ? Then would pardon and peace be given without delay. Then would the favor of God rest upon you. For God has declared, that whoever is satisfied with Christ shall find favor with him. His desire is that you should come to be as one with him in this great thing. He asks nothing of you, save this. But with nothing else than this will he be content, nor will he receive you on any other footing, save that of one who has come to be satisfied with Christ, and with what Christ has done.

Surely all this is simple enough. Does it exactly meet your case. Satisfaction with yourself, even could you get it, would do nothing for you. Satisfaction with Christ would do everything; for Christ is ALL. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Be pleased with him in whom the Father is pleased, and all is well.

I suspect that some of those difficulties of yours arise from the secret idea that the gospel is just a sort of modified law, by keeping which you are to be saved. You know that the old law is far above your reach, and that it condemns, but cannot save you. But you think, perhaps, that Christ came to make the law easier, to lower its demands, to make it (as some say) an evangelical law, with milder terms, suited to the sinner's weakness. That this is blasphemy, a moment's thought will show you. For it means that the former law was too strict; that is, it was not holy, and just, and good. It denies also Christ's words, that he came not to destroy but to fulfill the law. God has but one law, and it is perfect; its substance is love to God and man. A milder law must mean an imperfect one; a law that makes God's one law unnecessary; a law that gives countenance to sin. Will obedience to an imperfect law save the breaker of the perfect law? But faith does not make void the law; it establishes it.

It is by a perfect law that we are saved; else it would be an unholy salvation. It is by a perfect law, fulfilled in every "jot and tittle," that we are saved; else it would be an unrighteous salvation. The Son of God has kept the law for us; he has magnified it and made it honorable; and thus we have a holy and righteous salvation. Though above law in himself, he was made under the law for us; and by the vicarious law keeping of his spotless life, as well as by endurance unto death of that law's awful penalties, we are redeemed from the curse of the law. "Christ is the end (the fulfilling and exhausting) of the law, for righteousness to every one that believeth." FOR CHRIST IS NOT A HELPER, BUT A SAVIOUR. He has not come to enable us to save ourselves, by keeping a mitigated law; but to keep the unmitigated law in our room, that the law might have no claim for penalty, upon any sinner who will only consent to be indebted to the law keeping and law enduring of the divine Surety.

Others of your difficulties spring from confounding the work of the Spirit in us with the work of Christ for us. These two must be kept distinct; for the intermingling of them is the subversion of both. Beware of overlooking either; beware of keeping them at a distance from each other. Though quite distinct, they go hand in hand, inseparably linked together, yet each having its own place and its own office. Your medicine and your physician are not the same, yet they go together. Christ is your medicine, the Spirit is your physician. Do not take the two works as if they were one compounded work; nor try to build your peace upon some mystic gospel which is made up of a strange mixture of the two. Realize both, the outward and the inward; the objective and the subjective; Christ for us, and the Holy Spirit in us.

As at the first, so to the last, must this distinctiveness be observed, lest, having found peace in believing, you lose it by not holding the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end. "When I begin to

doubt," writes one, "I quiet my doubts by going back to the place where I got them first quieted; I go and get peace again where I got it at the beginning; I do not sit down gloomily to mull over my own faith or unbelief, but over the finished work of Immanuel; I don't try to reckon up my experiences, to prove that I once was a believer, but I believe again as I did before; I don't examine the evidence of the Spirit's work in me, but I think of the sure evidences which I have of Christ's work for me, in his death, and burial, and resurrection. This is the restoration of my peace. I had begun to look at other objects; I am now recalled from my wanderings to look at Jesus only."

Some of your difficulties seem to arise from a mixing up of the natural and the supernatural. Now the marvelous thing in conversion is, that while all is supernatural (being the entire work of the Holy Ghost), all is also natural. You are, perhaps unconsciously, expecting some miraculous inrush of heavenly power and brightness into your soul; something apart from divine truth, and from the working of man's powers of mind. You have been expecting faith to descend, like an angel from heaven, into our soul, and hope to be lighted up like a new star in your firmament. It is not so. Whilst the Spirit's work is beyond nature, it is not against nature. He displaces no faculty; he disturbs no mental process; he does violence to no part of our moral framework; he creates no new organ of thought or feeling. His office is to set all to rights within you; so that you never feel so calm, so true, so real, so perfectly natural, so much yourself, - as when He has taken possession of you in every part; and filled your whole man with his heavenly joy. Never do you feel so perfectly free, - less constrained and less mechanical, - in every faculty, as when he has "brought every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." The heavenly life imparted is liberty, and truth, and peace; it is the removal of bondage, and pain. So far from being a mechanical constraint, as some would represent, it is the removal of the iron chain with which guilt had bound the sinner. It acts like an army of liberation to a down-trodden country; like the warm breath of spring to the frost-fettered tree. For the entrance of true life, or living truth, into man's soul, must be liberty, not bondage. "The truth shall make you FREE."

Other difficulties arise out of confused ideas as to the proper order of truth. Misplaced truth is sometimes more injurious than actual error. In our statements of doctrine, we are to have regard to God's order of things, as well as to the things themselves. If you would solve the simplest question in arithmetic, the figures must not only be the proper ones, but they must be placed in proper order. So is it with the doctrines of the word of God. Some seem to fling them about in ill-assorted couples, or confused bundles, as if it mattered little to the hearer or reader what order was preserved, provided only certain truths were distinctly announced. Much trouble to the anxious spirit has arisen from this reckless confusion. A gospel in which election is placed first is not the gospel of the apostles; though certainly a gospel in which election is denied is still less the apostolic gospel. The true gospel is neither that Christ died for the elect, nor that he died for the whole world; for the excellency of the gospel does not lie in its announcement of the numbers to be saved, but in its proclamation of the great propitiation itself. Some who are supposed to be holding fast the form of sound words present us with a mere dislocation of the gospel, the different truths being so jumbled, that while they may be all there, they produce no result. They rather so neutralize each other as to prevent the sinner extracting from them the good news which, when rightly put together, they most assuredly contain. If the verses or chapters of the Epistle to the Romans were transposed or jumbled together, would it be the Epistle to the Romans, though every word were there? So, if, in teaching the gospel, we do not begin at the beginning; if, for instance, we tell the sinner what he has to do, before we tell him what God has done; if we tell him to examine his own heart before we tell him to study the cross of Christ; we take out the whole gladness from the glad tidings, and preach another gospel.

Do we not often, too, read the Bible as if it were a book of law, and not the revelation of grace? In so doing, we draw a cloud over it, and read it as a volume written by a hard master. So that a harsh tone is imparted in its words, and the legal element is made to obscure the evangelical. We are slow to read it as the expansion of the first gracious promise to man; as a revelation of the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; as the book of grace, specially written for us by the Spirit of grace. The law is in it, yet the Bible is not law, but gospel. As Mount Sinai rears its head, an isolated mass of hard, red granite, amid a thousand desert mountains of softer and less stern material, so does the law stand in the Bible; - a necessary part of it, - but not the characteristic of it; added because of transgressions till the seed should come. Yet have not our suspicious hearts darkened this book of light? Do we not often read it as the proclamation of a command to do, instead of a declaration of what the love of God has done?

Oh, strange! We believe in Satan's willingness to tempt and injure; but not in God's willingness to deliver and to save! Nay, more, we yield to our great enemy when he seduces into sin, and leads away from Christ and heaven; but we will not yield to our truest friend, when he draws us with the cords of a man, and with bands of love! We will not give God the credit for speaking truly when he speaks in tender mercy, and utters over the sinner the yearnings of his unfathomable pity. We listen, as if his words were hollow; as if he did not mean what he says; as if his messages of grace, instead of being the most thoroughly sincere that ever fell on human ears, were mere words of course.

There is nothing in the whole Bible to repel the sinner, and yet the sinner will not come! There is everything to draw and to win; yet the sinner stands aloof! Christ receiveth sinners; yet the sinner turns away! He yearns over them, weeps over them, as over Jerusalem; yet the sinner is unmoved! The heavenly compassion is unavailing; the infinite long-suffering touches not the stony heart, and the divine tears are thrown away. The Son of God stretches out his hands all the day long, but the outstretched hands are disregarded. All, all seems in vain to arrest the heedless, and to win back the wanderer.

Oh, the amount of divine love that has been expended upon this sad world, - that has been brought to bear upon the needy sons of men! We sometimes almost doubt whether it be true or possible, that God should lavish such a love on such a world. But the cross is the blessed memorial of the love, and that saying stands unchangeable: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Sometimes, too, we say, What is the use of throwing away such love? Is not the earnestness of God disproportioned to the littleness of its object, - man? It would be so were this life all; were there no eternity, no heaven, no hell, no endless gladness, and no everlasting woe. But with such a destiny as man's; with an eternity like that which is in store for him, - can any amount of earnestness be too great? Can love or pity exceed their bounds? Can the joy or grief over a sinner saved or lost be exaggerated?

He, whose infinite mind knows what heaven is, knows what its loss must be to an immortal being. Can He be too much in earnest about its gain? He whose all-reaching foresight knows what hell is, in all its never-ending anguish, sees afar off, and fathoms the horrors of the lost soul, its weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth for ever; its horrible sense of condemnation and immitigable woe; its cutting remorse, its too late repentance, its hopeless sighs, its bitter memories of earth's sunny hours; with all the thousand sadnesses that go to make up the sum total of a lost eternity! Can he, then, pity too much? Can he yearn too tenderly over souls that are madly bent on flinging themselves into a doom like this? Can he use words too strong, or too affectionate, in warning them against such a darkness, and such a devil, and such a hell? Can he put forth words too affectionate in beseeching them to make sure of such a heaven as his?

In the minds of some, the idea prevails, that sin quenches pity for the sinner, in the heart of God.

It is not so. That it shall do so hereafter, and that God will cease to pity the lost, is an awful truth. The lost soul's eternity will be an unpitied eternity of woe.

But, meanwhile, God's hatred of the sin is not hatred of the sinner. Nay, the greatness of his sin seems rather to deepen than to lessen the divine compassion. At least we may say that the increasing misery which increasing sin entails calls into new intensity the paternal pity of the God of the spirits of all flesh. "It grieves him at his heart." The farther the prodigal goes into the far country, the more do the yearnings of the father's heart go out after him in unfeigned compassion for the wretched wanderer, in his famine, and nakedness, and degradation, and hopeless grief.

No; sin does not quench the pitying love of God. The kindest words ever spoken to Israel were in the very height of their apostasy and rebellion. The most gracious invitation ever uttered by the Lord was to Capernaum, and Bethsaida, and Chorazin, "Come unto me." The most loving message ever sent to a Church was that to Laodicea, the worst of all the seven, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." It was Jerusalem, in her utmost extremity of guilt, and rebellion, and unbelief, that drew forth the tears of the Son of God. No; sin does not extinguish the love of God to the sinner. Many waters cannot quench it, nor can the floods drown it. From first to last, God pursues the sinner as he flies from him; pursues him not in hatred, but in love; pursues him not to destroy, but to pardon and to save.

God is not a man that he should lie. He means what he says, when he speaks in pity, as truly as when he speaks in wrath. His words are not mere random expressions, such as man often uses when uttering vague sentiment, or trying to produce an impression by exaggerated representations of his feelings. God's words are all true and real. You cannot exaggerate the genuine feeling which they contain; and to understand them as figures, is not only to convert them into unrealities, but to treat them as falsehoods. Let sinners take God's words as they are; the genuine expressions of the mind of that infinitely truthful Being, who never uses but the words of truth and soberness. He is sovereign; but that sovereignty is not at war with grace; nor does it lead to insincerity of speech, as some seem to think it does. Whether we can reconcile the sovereignty with the pity, it matters not. Let us believe them both, because both are revealed in the Bible. Nor let us ever resort to an explanation of the words of pity, which would imply that they were not sincerely spoken; and that if a sinner took them too literally and too simply, he would be sorely disappointed; - finding them at last mere exaggerations, if not empty air.

Oh, let us learn to treat God as not merely the wisest, and the highest, and the holiest, but as the most truthful of all beings. Let the heedless sinner hear his truthful warnings, and tremble; for they shall all be fulfilled. Let the anxious sinner listen to his truthful words of grace, and be at peace. We need to be told this. For there is in the minds of many, a feeling of sad distrust as to the sincerity of the divine utterances, and a proneness to evade their plain and honest meaning. Let us do justice, not merely to the love, but to the truthfulness, of God. There are many who need to be reminded of this; - yes, many, who do not seem to be at all aware of their propensity to doubt even the simple truthfulness of the God of truth.

God is love. Yes, God is love. Can such a God be suspected of insincerity in the declarations of his long-suffering, yearning compassion toward the most rebellious and impenitent of the sons of men? That there is such a thing as righteousness; that there is such a place as hell; that there are such beings as lost angels and lost men, we know to be awful certainties. But, however terrible and however true these things may be, they cannot cast the slightest doubt upon the sincerity of the great oath which God has sworn before heaven and earth, that he has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live;" nor in the least blunt the solemn edge of his gracious entreaty, "TURN YE, TURN YE,

FOR WHY WILL YE DIE?"

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