

Reconciliation, Atonement, and Judgment

by P.T. Forsyth

God's atonement is necessary for reconciliation, and it's not just a matter of individual conversions, but a solidary and final reconciliation that affects the whole world.

Scripture: Psalm 85:10, Isaiah 33:22, Isaiah 43:4, John 3:16, Romans 3:25, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:13, Hebrews 9:28, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Atonement Theology", "Divine Reconciliation"

Description

P.T. Forsyth preaches about the necessity of objective atonement, emphasizing that God Himself made the offering for reconciliation. He delves into the idea that God's atonement was initially made on behalf of the entire human race, setting the foundation for individual reconciliation. Forsyth highlights the importance of God reconciling Himself rather than being reconciled by a third party, stressing the need for a change in treatment rather than a change in God's affection. He explains that the Cross of Christ was not just an object lesson but a real and decisive act that established holiness and judgment, leading to the reconciliation of the world and individuals.

Transcript

The point at which I broke off yesterday was this. I was pointing out that objective atonement is absolutely necessary. Of course, it is quite necessary also that we should know what is meant by an objective atonement. The real objective element in atonement is not that something was offered to God, but that God made the offering. And in this connection I hinted that my remarks today and tomorrow would have to follow the idea also, that God's atonement initially was made on behalf of the race, and on behalf of individuals in so far as they were members of the race.

The first charge upon Christ and His Cross was the reconciliation of the race, and of its individuals by implication. We start today, then, from the position that God made the atonement. This (we saw) suggests a number of questions, not to say difficulties. If God made the atonement, but reconciliation meant no more than simply the moving and attuning of individual men in their subjective experience, it might seem as though it destroyed the solidarity of mankind and made it granular.

And the peril there is that whatever destroys that, destroys the universality of Christ's work. But that atomism is not the Gospel. To reduce the reconciliation merely to the aggregate of individual conversions would be a total misrepresentation of New Testament reconciliation, which is both solidary and final. Then there is another difficulty. If we say that the one object of the atonement was not the reconciliation of God,

but the reconciliation of man to God, then it looks as though the work of Christ became only the grand heliograph from divine heights, the chief word in what I might call a language of signs; as though it were only the leading expression of God's will towards men, instead of something actually done, and not merely said or shown, by God, something really done from the depth of God Who is the action of the world, something eternally changing the whole situation, and destiny, and responsibility of our race.

If God in Christ simply said the most powerful word about His goodwill, His placability, and His permanence of Christ - the depth of His work, and the height of His place. Thus God would be saying more than He did; and we have a natural and proper difficulty in thoroughly trusting people who say more than they do. If Christ were simply an expression of God's love, then His Cross would simply be what is called an object-lesson of God's love; or it would simply be a witness to the serious way in which God takes man's sin; or it might even be no more than the expression of the strong conviction of Jesus about it.

We are exposed to the danger there always is when we make revelation a word rather than a deed, something said instead of something done, when we make it manifestation only and redemption. The work of Christ would be only something educational, or at most impressive. And what happens then? If the work of Christ is only impressively educational, if the need and value of it ceases when we have recognized its meaning, when we have taken God's word for it in Christ that He does really love us, what happens then?

Why, as soon as the lesson had been learnt, the work of Christ might be left behind. There are a great many people today who are Christian in a way, but have very loose ideas as to what is involved centrally in their Christianity. Many of them are in this position I describe - they think they can ignore Christ and the work of Christ since they have assimilated the lesson these taught. If the Cross is a kind of practical parable which God set forth of His love and His willingness to save, then when the parable has done its work it can be forgotten.

When the lesson has been taught, the example can be put away into the school store-room until we want it again. It is exhausted for the time being, until somebody else comes who needs the same lesson. In that case the work of Christ simply sinks to the level of other valuable events in the history of religion. It is not fountal but episodic. It represents the transition from Judaism to a religion of Humanity. It represents a great movement in the history of religion, when religion ceased to be national and particularist, and became universal, when it ceased to be ritual and became spiritual.

The death of Christ would thus be a great monument in the past, which fades out of sight as we surmount it and leave it behind; and it does not retain a permanent meaning and function at the center of our faith. I said that the work of Christ meant not only an action on man, it meant an action on God. Yet I pointed out that it was more false than true to say that Christ and His death reconciled God to man. I said that we must in some way construe the matter as God reconciling Himself.

It was out of the question to think of any reconciliation effected upon God by a third party standing between God and man. God could not be reconciled by man nor by one neither God nor man. The only alternative, therefore, is that God should reconcile Himself. But then is there not something in that which seems a little forced and unnatural? Did God have to compel Himself to change His feeling about us? Did He force Himself to be gracious? There is something wrong here surely, something that needs adjustment, explanation, restatement in some way.

Are we obliged to suppose that if God did reconcile Himself it was in the sense of changing His own heart and affection towards us? I have pointed out that the heart of God towards us, His gracious disposition towards us, was from His own holy eternity; that grace is of the unchangeable. God in that respect had not to be changed. Was He changed at all then? If His heart was not changed, what remained in Him to be changed, what was changed in connection with the work of Christ?

There was a change. And I am going to ask you to recognize here another of those valuable distinction of which the man without the evangelical experience and its theological discipline is so impatient. As I work my way through the difficulties and questions that present themselves, over and over again I perceive that many of the difficulties that seem so serious to some turn entirely upon some valuable distinction that has been ignored, often for lack of deep religion or due professional education.

Of course the man in the street says, as soon as he is asked to distinguish, that that is getting into the region of subtleties. Never mind the man in the street. The distinguished person for him is the person with the least distinction from himself, the person who gives him most satisfaction with least trouble, the person who works in black and white with no shades. Besides, the man in the street is not devoted to his Bible, nor to getting into the interior of the Bible, as you preachers are.

We must take our way, God's way, and follow the subtle and searching Holy Spirit as He leads and speaks in and through the questions that arise to our earnest thought concerning Christ's death. And the man in the street must be left to the grace which has taken us in from the street. The distinction I ask you to observe is between a change of feeling and a change of treatment, between affection and discipline, between friendly feeling and friendly relations. God's feeling toward us never needed to be changed.

But God's treatment of us, God's practical relation to us - that had to change. I have pointed out that the relation between God and man in reconciliation is a personal one, and that, where you have real personal relation and personal communion, if there is change on one side there must be change on the other. The question is as to the nature of the change. We have barred out the possibility of its being a change of affection, of hatred into grace. God never ceased to love us even when He was most angry and severe with us.

It will not do to abolish the reality of God's anger towards us. True love is quite capable of being angry, and must be angry and even sharp with its beloved children. Let us fix our attention more closely upon this distinction of mood and manner. Take the parable of the prodigal for illustration. There are those who say you have the whole of the gospel really in the parable of the prodigal son, that that was the culmination of Christ's grand revelation of God. Well, if that were so the wonder to me is, first, that the apostles never seem to have used it; and, second, that having delivered this parable Christ did not at once consider His mission discharged and return to heaven.

Or, on the other hand, why did He not continue to live to a ripe and useful age, reiterating in various forms and in different settings this waiting (but inert) love and grace of God? We are moved sometimes to think He might have done well had He not provoked death so early, had He remained, like John, to seventy or ninety years of age continually publishing, applying, and spreading the message which He gave His disciples. But you have not the whole gospel in the parable of the prodigal son.

What is the function of a parable? It is one of the great discoveries and lessons taught us by modern scholarship, that parables are not allegories, because they exist for the sake of one central idea. While we may allow ourselves, under the suggestion of the Holy Spirit to receive hints of edifying truth from this or

the other phase or detail of the parable, we have chiefly to ask, What was it in the mind of Christ for the sake of which He uttered this parable? Each parable puts in an ample ambit one central idea.

Now the one ruling idea in the parable of the prodigal son is the idea of the centrality, the completeness, the unreservedness, the freeness, fullness, whole-heartedness of God's grace - the absolute fullness of it, rather than the method of its action. But however a parable might preach that fullness, it took the Cross and all its train to give it effect, to put it into action, life, and history, to charge it with the Spirit. Those who tell us that the whole gospel is embodied in the parable say, You observe nothing is suggested in the parable about the Cross and the Atonement; therefore the Cross and the Atonement are subsequent and gratuitous additions, confusing the gospel of grace.

But that turns Christ into a mere preacher, instead of the center of the world's history. Bear in mind also that this parable was spoken by the Christ who had the Cross in the very structure of His personality as its vocation, and at the root, therefore, of all His words. That Cross was deep embedded in the very structure of Christ's Person, because nowadays you cannot separate His Person from His vocation, from the work He came to do, and the words He came to speak. The Cross was not simply a fate awaiting Christ in the future; it pervaded subliminally His holy Person.

He was born for the Cross. It was His genius, His destiny. It was quite inevitable that, in a world like this, One holy as Jesus was holy should come to the Cross. The parable was spoken by One in whom the Cross and all it stands for were latent in His idea of God; and it became patent, came to the surface, became actual, and practical, and powerful in the stress of man's crisis and the fullness of God's time. That is an important phrase. Christ Himself came in a fullness of time.

The Cross which consummated and crowned Christ came in its fullness of time. The time was not full during Christ's life for preaching an atonement that life could never make. Hence as to the method of God's free and flowing grace the parable has nothing to say. It does not even say that the father was seeking the prodigal. The seeking grace of God we find there as little as the redeeming grace. And so also you have not the mode of grace's action on a world. But, speaking of what you do have in the parable, the father knows no change of feeling towards the prodigal; yet could he go on making no difference?

Could he go on treating the prodigal as though he never had become a prodigal? He did not certainly when he returned; and as little could he before. His heart followed the prodigal, but his relations, his confidence, his intercourse were with his brother. So long as the son is prodigal he cannot be treated as though he were otherwise. Even repentance needs some guarantee of permanence. The father's heart is the same, but his treatment must be different. Cases have been known where the father had to expel the black sheep from the family for the sake of the others.

Loving the poor creature all the same, he yet found it quite impossible, in the interests of the whole family, to treat him as though he were like the rest. So God needed no placation, but He could not exercise His kindness to the prodigal world, He certainly could not restore communion with its individuals, without doing some act which permanently altered the relation. And this is what set up that world's reconciliation with Him. It was set up by an act of crisis, of judgment.

Remember always we are dealing with the world in the first instance and not with individuals. I constantly come back upon that, for the orthodox and their critics forget it alike. I suppose the prodigal was a slave, I suppose he had sold himself to that vile work of swine-feeding. When he returned I suppose he ran away from his master. But the prodigal world, of course, could not run away from its master, it could not run

away from the power that it was enslaved to. "Myself am hell."

Supposing now the prodigal had not been able to run away. Supposing he had been guarded as a convict is guarded, then he could only come back by being bought of. As soon as you go beyond the one theme of the parable, the absolute heartiness of grace, and begin to think of grace's methods with a world, this point must be faced by all who are more than pooh-pooh sentimentalists in their religion. We have to deal with a world in a bondage it could not break. If the prodigal could not have arisen to go to his father; if the elder brother had sold up the whole farm, reduced himself to poverty, taken the sum in his hand, followed the prodigal into the far country, and there spent the whole amount in buying his brother's manumission from his master before a judge; and if it was all done by mutual purpose and consent of himself and his father; would not that act be a great and effective thing, not so much in producing repentance but in a harder matter - in destroying a lien and making absolute certainty of the father's forgiveness?

He is sure because the father not only says but pays. His mere repentance could not make him sure, could not place him at home again, could not put him where he set out. His mere repentance could turn his heart to his father, but it could not break the bar and fill him with certainty of his father's love and forgiveness. And that is what the sinner wants, and what the great and classic penitents find it so hard to believe. Now, the parable tells us of the freeness of God's grace, and its fullness, but the Cross enacts it and inserts it in really history.

It shows to what length that grace could go in dealing with a difficulty otherwise insuperable when we turn from a single prodigal to a world. The act which I have described by a New Testament extension of the parable - the act of Christ's Cross - is not simply to produce individual repentance, but it has its great effect upon the relation of the whole world to God. And the judgment, the payment, was on that scale. I will show you later that it was not pain that was paid but holy obedience.

What the elder brother does in the supposition I have made is twofold. First, he secures the liberation, he deals with the equitable conditions of the release. Secondly, he also acts upon the prodigal's heart and confidence. In the first case he meets certain judicial conditions, certain social conditions, ethical conditions, bound up with the existing order, the law of society in which the prodigal was living. But it is said sometimes that there the analogy fails, because the elder son, acting for the father, in my extension of the story, has to deal with a law which is outside his control and outside the father's control; he has to deal with the law of society, with the law of the land where the prodigal was.

Whereas, if you come to think about God, there can be no social and moral conditions which are outside His control. There, it is said, your illustration breaks down. God could ignore any such impediments at His loving will. Now, that is just the crucial mistake that you make, that even Kant does not allow us to make. God could do nothing of the kind. So far the omnipotence of God is a limited omnipotence. He could not trifle with His own holiness. He could will nothing against His holy nature, and He could not abolish the judgment bound up with it.

Nothing in the compass of the divine nature could enable Him to abolish a moral law, the law of holiness. That would be tampering with His own soul. It had to be dealt with. Is the law of God more loose than the law of society? Can it be taken liberties with, played with, and put aside at the impulse even of love? How little we should come to think of God's love if that were possible! How essential the holiness of that love is to our respect for it and our faith in its unchangeableness!

It God's love were not essentially holy love, in course of time mankind would cease to respect it, and consequently to trust it. We need not a fond love, but a love we can trust, and for ever. What love wants is not simply love in response, but respect and confidence. In the bringing up of children today one often wishes they had more training in respect, even if less in affection. God's holy law is His own holy nature. His love is under the condition of eternal respect. It is quite unchangeable.

It is just as much outside His operation, so far as abrogation goes, as was the law of the far country to the father of the prodigal. What was there in the work of Christ which went beyond a mere impressive declaration of a God who could not help being gracious, but fell on the prodigal's neck without more ado? It was solidary judgment. I am urging that the difficulty we have in answering that questions is due to our modern individualism. Individualism has done its work for Christianity for the time being, and we are now suffering from its after-effects.

We do not realize that we are each one of us saved in a racial salvation. We are each one of us saved in the salvation of the race, in a collectivist redemption. What Christ saved was the whole human race. What He bought, if we may provisionally use the metaphor, was the Church, and not any aggregate of isolated souls. So great is a soul, and so great is its sin, that each man is only saved by an act which at the same time saves the whole world. If you reduce or postpone Christ's effect upon the totality of the world, you are in the long run preparing the way for a poor estimate of the human soul.

The more you abolish the significance of Christ's redeeming death once for all, the more you are doing to lower Humanity morally, and make it a less precious thing than the cosmic world around us. My plea is that with no atonement, no solidary judgment of sin, you reduce reconciliation not only to sentiment but to a piecemeal series of individual repentances and conversions, leaving it a problem whether the race as a whole will be saved at last. For the universality of Christianity (so dear to Broad Church) you must have that foregone finality which the New Testament offers in the atonement.

I pointed out to you that in the Old Testament, for the most part, what faced God was not this prophet or that saint, this king or that particular juncture, but Israel. I said that in the subsequent phases of Jewish religion, indeed, that idea has its detail filled in; and in the later psalms, in many of those psalms which we know could only have been written after the captivity, you have pious individualism sometimes expressing itself very strongly. But there the two warring notes were - new individualism and old collectivism; and between these there never came complete reconciliation until Christ came and Christ's work.

What have we in that great text, John 3:16? "God so loved the world" - the world was the prime object of God's love - "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life." Love in the first instance directed upon the world, but directed upon the world in such a way that it should be taken home in every individual experience. Mark the two words, "the world" and "whosoever". Dwell upon the contrast.

God loved not this or that individual, or group of individuals, only. "God so loved the world" that He did something to it in such a way that every individual "whosoever" should receive the benefit, and receive it in the only way which made a world of saved individuals possible. You can never compound a saved world out of any number of saved individuals. But God did so save the world as to carry individual salvation in the same act. The Son of God was not an individual merely; He was the representative of the whole race, and its vis-a-vis, on its own scale.

So that, in Ephesians, the Church, in rising to Christ, had to acquire the fullness of a complete and colossal man. No individual prophet of salvation could save the world. He could not be capable of a pity great enough, or a love. The world could only be saved by somebody as large as the world, and indeed larger. If he could not save the world he could make no eternal salvation of any individual. It is universal, eternal salvation every way - universal not by the addition of all units, but in a solidary sense.

What we are tempted to think of in our common version of Christianity is a mass of people, great or small, a mass of individuals, each one of whom makes his own terms with God and gets discharge of his sin. It is salvation by private bargain. In conversion every individual makes his own peace with God through Jesus Christ, so that the work of God becomes a mere change of attitude, feeling, or temper of the side of man after man. That is not the New Testament idea. Again, in speaking of the change in God, Christ has been represented as enabling God to forgive by enabling Him to adjust His two attributes of justice and mercy within Himself.

Some theologians of the Reformation - Melancthon for one - spoke of Christ in that fashion. But we have entirely outgrown that way of thinking and talking about it. It has produced much difficulty and scepticism. What does it proceed upon? It proceeds upon a certain definition of an attribute, as though an attribute were something loose within God which He could manipulate - as though the attributes of God were not God Himself, unchangeable God, in certain relations. The attributes of God are not things within Himself which He could handle and adjust.

An attribute of God is God Himself behaving, with all His unity, in a particular way in a particular situation. God is a thinking God, let us say. He has the attribute of thought. Does that mean that the attribute of thought could be taken away, that God could divest Himself of it? No. The thought of God is simply God thinking. So also the love of God is not an attribute of God; it is God loving. The holiness of God is not an attribute of God; it is the whole God Himself as holy.

There is nothing in the Bible about the strife of attributes. Rather remember 1 John 1:9, "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." It is in the exercise of His faithfulness to Himself and His observance of justice that He should forgive. It lies in the very holiness that condemns. There is a similar text in the Psalms, "Thou art merciful; Thou givest to every man according to his work." He is the faithful and just to forgive. There needed no adjustment of His justice with His forgiveness.

So also in Isaiah, "A just God and a Savior." There can be therefore be no strife of attributes. What, then, does it mean when we hear about the anger of God being turned away? To begin with, the anger of God means a great deal more than His passion, His temper, His mode of feeling, more than anger as an affection. The anger of God in the Bible means much rather the judgment of God in the reaction of His moral and spiritual order. The judgment of God is perfectly compatible with His continued love, just as a father's punishment is perfectly compatible with his love for his children.

The father has to discipline his children. He institutes certain laws, the children disobey; they must be punished, or, using the more dignified term, judged. The anger of God: we shall get the most meaning out of it when we think of it as the judgment of God, the exalted, inflexible judgment of God. Taking a step further, it is judgment on the world. It seems at first sight as though it were meaningless to speak as if God could be wroth with the world and yet gracious and loving to individuals.

But I may be very angry with a political party, yet I cherish respect and love for individuals belonging to that party. We must be on our guard against narrow, individual views, against treating individuals

according to their public and collective condemnation. We are created, redeemed, judged as members of a race or of a Church. Salvation is personal, but it is not individual. (There is another distinction for you, if you have come in off the street.) It is personal in its appropriation but collective in its nature.

What did the Reformation stand for? Not for religious individualism. But I hear some one asking in the back of his mind, Was not the Reformation the charter of private judgment and individual independence? It was nothing of the kind. It was the charter of personal direct faith and its freedom. What the Reformation did was to turn religion from being a thing mainly institutional into a thing mainly personal. The reformers were as strong as their opponents about the necessity of the Church for the soul - though as its home, not its master.

They were not individualists. Individualism is fatal to faith. It was the backbone of the rationalism and atheism of the French Revolution. The Reformation stands for personal religion and social religion and not for religious individualism. There is no such thing as an absolute individual. What is the change that takes place when we are converted? Our change is really from one membership to another, from membership of the world to membership of the Church. When we become a member of the Church we are not really changed from individualism, but from membership of the world.

It is membership either way. The greatest egoist and self-seeker is a member of the world. He could not indulge his egotism if it were not for the society in the midst of which he lives and into which he is articulated. He is a member of the world who exploits his membership instead of serving with it. When we are converted we are not converted from a sheer and absolute individual. There never was such a person. Certainly Robinson Crusoe was not. We are converted from membership of the world to membership of Christ.

Before our conversion and after we belong. We are not absolute, solitary individuals. We are in a society, an organism. We are made by the past. And our selfish, godless actions and influence go out, radiate, affect the organism as they could not do were we absolute units. They spread far beyond our memory or control. In the same way we are acted upon by the other people. We are members one of another both for evil and for good. When you are told that evil is only selfishness it is worth while bearing this in mind.

Even as selfish men, as egoists, we belong - only to a pagan order instead of to Christ. The selfish man is a member of a kingdom of evil. There is no such thing as an absolute individual. Hence, to save us, to reconcile us, involves the whole race we belong to. Before God that race is an organic unity. It is not a mere mass of atoms joined together by various arbitrary relations, sympathies, and affinities. Hence, as the race before God is one, a personal God is able to do for the race some one thing which at the same time is good for every person in it.

But now, if the race is a unity, where does its unity lie? Does it lie in our elementary affections for each other, in the palpable relationships of natural life with our parents, brothers, lovers, and friends? Or is the unity of the race simply its capacity for being organized by skillful engineers? Is the unity of the race like the unity of machines? No. The unity of the race is a moral unity. Therefore it is a unity of conscience. If you want to find the trunk out of which all the loves and practices of humanity proceed, you must go to conscience at the center.

That is where the unity of Humanity lies. It is in the conscience, where man is member of a vast moral world. It is the one changeless order of the moral world, emerging in conscience, that makes man universal. What have you to preach if you have no gospel that goes to the foundations of human

conscience? What ground have you for a social religion? The most universal God is one that goes there, not to the heart in the sense of affections, but to the conscience. The great motive for missions of every high kind is not sentiment, but salvation.

It is dangerous to take your theology from poets and literary people. You quote, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Well, if you are going to build a religion on that, it will have a very short life. In the long run nature means anarchy when taken by and for itself. But it was never meant to be taken by itself. It was meant to go in an eternal context with super-nature. It is not the touch of nature that makes us kin enough for religion, for eternity, but the touch, and more than a touch, of the supernatural - not nature, but grace.

What makes the world God's world is the action and unity of God's moral order of which our conscience speaks. Now, if that order be broken, how can it be healed? If I slit the canvas of this tent it can be patched. I make a fissure, but it is not irremediable. I simply get some one to stitch it up. At the worst I can have a new width put in. But if the moral order, and its universal solidarity, its holiness, is broken, how can that be healed? That cannot be patched up. It is not merely a rent in a tissue, a gap in a process, which the same process goes on to heal into a scar.

The moral law differs from all natural law in having in it a demand, a claim, an "ought" of a universal kind. It is all of one piece. We use the word "law" in a loose kind of way. We apply the same word to gravitation and to the moral law of retribution. It is that ambiguity of terms which leads us astray. The moral law differs from every other law in having a demand, and a universal demand, a claim upon us for ever. And that has to be made good as well as the rents and bruises in us from our own collision with it.

It is not a gap that has to be made good and sound. It is a claim, because we are here in a moral and not a natural world. It is one thing to make good a gap and another thing to make good a claim. The claim must be met. It will not do simply to draw the edges together by mere amendment, to have God here and man there, and gradually bring them together till they unite. It is two moral persons with moral passions we have to do with. It is moral relationship that is in question, communion, trustful mutuality, is the object of the divine requirement.

It is a case of moral, holy reconciliation. It is the expression of God's holy personality whenever God makes His claim. It is Himself in holy, changeless personality that says, "Thou shalt." Then the claim can only be honored by personality of acknowledgment. But what does that mean? Some confession, some compunction - "I have sinned?" That is a poor acknowledgment of God's holiness. It was neither in word nor in feeling that we wounded that, but in life and deed. It must be acknowledged in like fashion - practically.

The holiness of God is the sum of all His action and relation to the world; and the acknowledgment of it must be made in like action. Do we acknowledge the holiness of God's infinite law simply when its penalty wrings from poor us a confession of sin? We acknowledge natural law in spite of ourselves when we suffer its penalty amid our rebellion. But the acknowledgment of moral, of holy law is something different. It must be actively acknowledged - acknowledged not in spite of ourselves but by ourselves, with our whole heart; and it cannot be acknowledged simply by individual, or, indeed, any suffering.

For divine judgment it must be acknowledged in kind and scale, and met by a like holiness. Mere suffering is no acknowledgment really; it is a pure sequel; it is not a confession of the moral law and its righteousness, only of its power. Mere suffering is no confession of the holiness of God. God, truly, might

and does assert His power upon our defiance by making us suffer. But do you think any holiness, any loving holiness, could be satisfied with making the offender suffer?

There is only one thing that can satisfy the holiness of God, and that is holiness - adequate holiness. To judge is to secure that at cost of any pain both to the judge and the culprit. But the pain is not the end. Nothing, no penalty, no passionate remorse, no verbal acknowledgment, no ritual, can satisfy the claim of holy law - nothing but holiness, actual holiness, and holiness upon the same scale as the one holy law which was broken. The confession must be adequate. Fix that word in your mind.

All your repentance, and all the world's repentance, would not be adequate to satisfying, establishing the broken law of holy God. Confession must be adequate - as Christ's was. We do not now speak of Christ's sufferings as being the equivalent of what we deserved, but we speak of His confession of God's holiness, his acceptance of God's judgment, being adequate in a way that sin forbade any acknowledgment from us to be. For the only adequate confession of a holy God is perfectly holy man.

Wounded holiness can only be met by a personal holiness upon the scale of the race, upon the universal scale of the sinful race, and upon the eternal scale of the holy God who was wounded. It is not enough that the eternal validity of the holy law should be declared as some prophet might arise and declare it, with power to make the world admire, as the great and sublime Kant did. It must take effect. Prophets have arisen who have produced tremendous effect by insisting upon the moral ultimacy in life and things.

The greatest prophets of the last century, like George Eliot, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Maurice among ourselves had that as a chief note. But it is not enough that the eternal validity and inflexibility of eternal law should be powerfully, searchingly declared. It must take effect. Its breach must be closed up not merely by recognition, but by judgment. It is not enough that the whole human race should come confessing, "We have offended against Thy holy law." That would recognize the holy law and confess its place, but it would not give it its own, it would not bring to pass that which is essential to holiness, namely, judgment.

It would not actually establish holiness in a kingdom, in command of history. You cannot separate the idea of holiness and its kingdom from the idea of judgment. In the Old Testament the final coming of the Great Salvation was always connected with a great judgment, which was therefore not a terror, as we view it, but the grandest hope. If the essence of God is that He should be holy, it is equally essential that He should judge. If He sets up actual holiness it must be by actual adjustment of everything to it.

It is not enough that we should say, "Thou art our Judge, we submit and are willing to take the penalty. The wages of sin is death." All that is best and greatest in human life turns upon something more than that. There is a phrase which I never tire of quoting, and it is this: "The dignity of man is better assured if he were broken upon the maintenance of that holiness of God than if it were put aside just to give him an existence." The dignity, the very dignity of man himself is better assured if he were broken upon the maintenance of that holiness of God than if it were put aside arbitrarily, just to let him off with his life.

This holy order is as essential to man's greatness as it is to God's; and that is why the holy satisfaction Christ made to God's holiness is in the same act the glorifier of the new humanity. Any religion which leaves out of supreme count the judging holiness of God is making a great contribution to the degradation of man. We need a religion which decides the eternal destiny of man; and unless holiness were practically and adequately established - not merely recognized and eulogized, but established - there could be no real, deep, permanent change in the world or the sinner.

The change in the treatment of us by eternal grace must rest on judgment taking effect. Man is not forgiven simply by forgetting and mending, by agreeing that no more is to be said about it. To make little of sin is to belittle the holiness of God; and from a reduced holiness no salvation could come, nor could human dignity remain. Here, perhaps, you want to ask me what I mean exactly by saying that the judgment-death of Christ set up a real and actual kingdom of holiness. It is a point which it is easier for faith to realize than for theology to explain.

But the answer would lie along this line: What Christ presented to God for His complete joy and satisfaction was a perfect racial obedience. It was not the perfect obedience of a saintly unit of the race. It was a racial holiness. God's holiness found itself again in the humbled holiness of Christ's "public person." He presented before God a race He created for holiness. Remember that the very nature of our faith in Christ is union with Him. The kingdom is set up by Christians being united with the work, the victory, the obedience, the holiness of the King.

Christ, in His victorious death and risen life, has power to unite the race to Himself, and to work His complete holiness into its actual experience and history. He has power, by uniting us with Him in His Spirit, to reduce Time to acknowledge in act and fact His conclusive victory of Eternity. When you think of what He did for the race and its history, you must on no account do what the Church and its theology has too often done - you must not omit our living union with Him.

It is not enough to believe that He gained a victory at a historic point. Christ is the condensation of history. You must go on to think of His summary reconciliation as being worked out to cover the whole of history and enter each soul by the Spirit. You must think of the Cross as setting up a new covenant and a new Humanity, in which Christ dwells as the new righteousness of God. "Christ for us" is only intelligible as "Christ in us" and we in Him. By uniting us to Himself and His resurrection in His Spirit He becomes the eternal guarantee of the historical consummation of all things some great day.

I return to this later. Sometimes, when I have been talking about this claim of God's holiness, a critic has said: "You are treating the holiness of God as though it were a power outside God, tying His hands." Nothing of the kind. What is meant by the holiness of God is the holy God. We talk nonsense in a like way about the decrees of God. We say they stand for the wretched survival of an outworn Calvinism, as though they were things that God could handle. Do you think that mighty men such as the great Reformers were would have been led into saying the things they did about God if they thought the decrees were simply things God could handle, or things like a doom on God?

The decrees of God were to them God decreeing. The holiness of God was God as holy. When that holiness is wounded or defied, could God be content to take us back with a mere censure or other penance and the declaration that He was holy? We could not respect a God like that. Servants despise indulgent masters. Sinners would despise a God who would take us back when we wept, and speak thus: "Let us say no more about it. You did very wrong, and you have suffered for it, and I; but let us forget it now you have come back," We should not respect that.

We should go on, as servants do in the case I have named, to take more liberties still. He would be a God who only talked His holiness and did not put it into force. Now, if our repentance were our atonement, and the Cross were simply an object-lesson to us of God's patient and tender mercy to penitence, He would be talking, I said, and not acting. He would mention the gravity of our sin very impressively, but that would not be establishing goodness actually in the history and experience of man.

The sinner's reconciliation to a God of holy love could not take place if guilt were not destroyed, if judgment did not take place on due scale, if the wrath of God did not somehow take real effect. You say, perhaps, it did take effect in the unseen world of spirits. But the moral world is not a world of ghostly spirits. It is the unseen side of the world of history and of experience, it is its inner reality and center. The vindication, the judgment, must take place within human history and experience.

It must take place in the terms of human history, by human action, in a place, at some point, on a due scale and with adequate depth. That was what took place in the Cross of Christ. The idea of judgment is not complete without the idea of a crisis, a day of judgment. Now the Cross of Christ was the world's great day of judgment, the crisis of all crises for history. The holy love of God yearning over souls could not deal with individual sinners, there was a cloud between God and the race, till the holiness was owned and perfectly praised by its racial confession, until holiness was confessed much more than sin, until on man's side there was not only confession of sin but confession of holiness from sin's side amid the experience of a judgment on the scale of the race, until the confessing race was thus put in right relation to God's holiness.

Then judgment had done its perfect work. The race's sin was covered and atoned by it, i.e., by the God who bore it. Individuals could not be reconciled to a holy God until He thus reconciled the world. Not until sin had been brought to do its very worst, and had in that culminating act been foiled, judged, and overcome; not till then could individuals receive the reconciliation. That was the unitary reconciliation they must receive in detail. God there, in a racial holiness amid racial curse, sets up a racial salvation, which our souls enter upon by faith.

It is by Himself in His changeless love and pity that it is set up. It is not the Son's suffering and death, but His holy obedience to both that is the satisfying thing to God, the holiness of God the Son. In a sense, a great solemn sense, it is an exercise of God's absolute self-satisfaction, exhibited after a long historic process, amidst the dissatisfaction of a world's ruin. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them." He set up reconciliation by an act of judgment on His Son, cutting off His own right hand that we might enter into the Kingdom of heaven: "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

The redemption was a thing that was coming through the whole of Israel's history, and in a remoter sense through the whole history of the world. The changeless holiness must assert itself in such judgment as surely as in the kingdom. You all believe that the holiness of God must assert itself in the Kingdom of God. But how can there be a final kingdom without final judgment? Is not all judgment in the name of the king, even in our human society? Are not king and judge inseparable, as inseparable as king and father?

We say today that king and father are inseparable. But king and judge are equally inseparable, especially if you take the great Old Testament idea. Christ submitted with all His heart to God's holy final judgment on the race. He did not view it as an unfortunate incident in His life. He did not treat it as though it happened to drop upon Him. But He treated it as the grand will of God, as the effectuation in history of God's holiness, which holiness must have complete response and practical confession both on its negative side of judgment and its positive side of obedience.

Christ's death was atoning not simply because it was sacrifice even unto death, but because it was sacrifice unto holy and radical judgment. There is something much more than being obedient unto death. Plenty of men can be obedient unto death; but the core of Christianity is Christ's being obedient unto

judgment, and unto the final judgment of holiness. It is being obedient to a kind of death prescribed by God, indispensable to the holiness of God's love, necessitated in such a world by the last moral conditions, and not simply inflicted by the wickedness of men.

Get rid of the idea that judgment is chiefly retribution, and directly infliction. Realize that it is, positively, the establishing and the securing of eternal righteousness and holiness. View punishment as an indirect and collateral necessity, like the surgical pains that make room for nature's curing power. You will then find nothing morally repulsive in the idea of judgment effected in and on Christ, any more than in the thought that the kingdom was set up in Him. To conclude, then, God could only justify man before Him by justifying Himself and His holy law before men.

If He had not vindicated His holiness to the uttermost in that way of judgment, it would not be a kind of holiness that men could trust. Thus a faith which could justify man, which could make a foundation for a new humanity, could not exist. We can only be eternally justified by faith in a God who justifies Himself as so holy that He must set up His holiness in human history at any price, even at the price of His own beloved and eternal Son. I close, then, upon that unchangeable word of God's self-justifying holiness.

Even the sinner could not trust a love that could not justify itself as holy. It is the holiness in God's love, I urge, that alone enables us to trust Him. Without that we should only love Him, and the love would fluctuate. For we could not be perfectly sure that His would not. It is the holiness in God's love that is the eternal, stable, unchangeable element in it - the holiness secured for history and its destiny in the Cross. It is only the unchangeable that we could trust; and there alone we find it. If we only loved the love of God, we should have no stable, eternal, universal religion. But we love the holy love He established in Christ, and therefore we are safe with an everlasting salvation.

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