

The Atonement

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"And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." (Romans 5:11)

This chapter contains eternal principles. It vindicates God. It shows sin to be what it is in God's sight, exceeding sinful; it makes the atonement the act of God. The putting away of sin was a miracle of the grace and love of God. Sin has separated between God and man; the forgiveness of sin must be in exact accordance with the infinite, eternal principle of justice. It was not just one act of God's will by which sin was removed, but an act of justice, of love, of wisdom, and of omnipotence. Sin has separated between God and our own individual souls, and that separation must continue eternally, if means be not devised whereby it can in consistence with divine justice be removed. And if God the Spirit should lay upon our hearts and consciences this truth as a principle never to be broken or destroyed, it would make sin terribly real, it would make our separation from God by sin terribly real, and our consciences would then be clamorous to know if there is a way of escape from the wrath to come, and from that fearful alienation from the life of God which is in all of us. Happy the man who feels his alienation! Happy the man who feels that his sin is such as that only Deity, in all the love and wisdom of it, can effectually remove! O what an awful thing it is to be a sinner! We may look with abhorrence upon men who are profligate, and whose society would be most objectionable to us, but what about our souls and their condition in sin? How utterly loathsome must we be as sinners in the sight of God! How utterly repugnant to His nature is our depraved nature! Not only is He different in nature, that must always be. A Creator will always have creatures, and creatures necessarily at an infinite distance from Him as the Creator; but that was in Eden for a time without any shame, without any repugnance, without any enmity. But since sin came, the creature is abominable (Job 15:16); and with sin on him he can never come near to God, nor can God speak friendly or comfortably to him.

Now look at this point. Let us ask ourselves here and now, whether we believe that; whether God has fixed the truth as a mighty principle in our consciences, that sin is not to be done away with by an act of omnipotence, not to be pardoned by an act of God's will standing alone; that sin can never be lessened by us, much less obliterated; that its guilt is, in effect, death, that its pollution is, in effect, eternal separation from God, if means be not devised whereby the awful thing can be put away consistently with His nature and perfections. Do you believe it? It is to be feared that in the religious world today sin is an exceedingly small thing, something awry, but so regarded that, if only the churches will stir themselves up, they can regenerate the world and make it quite right. But if grace makes us understand something of the nature of God, something of the nature of sin, we shall be at a point about this: that there is a bar, a fearful bar between God and us, a bar we can never touch, much less break and remove. Sin brought death, death in the soul, and eventually in the body. Death in the soul is the cutting off of the soul from the Source of life and of goodness, a fearful death this! The death of the body is as nothing compared with this, nothing. My brethren, "it is a fearful thing" for a sinner "to fall into the hands of the living God." Do you not believe that? Do you not feel it? To fall into the hands of a just and holy God covered

with sin, saturated with sin, burdened with guilt, cursed by the law, abhorred by the divine Majesty!

But God has devised means whereby His banished ones may be brought home; and the means we have in this chapter: the grace of God in choosing His Son, in electing the church and giving her to Him, in giving Him for the church, and His Son's love in redeeming her, with all that attached to her of wrong, of evil, of death. He came into her place, into her room, and took exactly her condition as to her guilt, her sin; for the Lord God His Father and the Father of all the elect took their sins from them, and imputed them to His Son. I wish I could enunciate this as it ought to be enunciated, to speak it as it deserves to be spoken: it is such a wonder. Sin is a mystery, a great mystery; sin came into Eden pure, and defiled Eden, defiled Eve, defiled Adam, and has since defiled the whole world. And if God were other than He is, this must have remained, this condition could not have been altered. But God is a God of love; He is a God of justice and truth. Mercy and truth met in one wondrous place, righteousness and peace kissed each other on the cross; and so God and men came together (Ps. 85:10,11). A dead church becomes a living church, a dead, individual soul becomes a living soul; and all through the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ into heaven. And we "rejoice in hope." "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1,2). And out of the conviction of these essential truths arise the cries, prayers, fears, seekings, sinkings, and risings of the people of God. Out of this fountain of life, life reaches them; and being in them, it works after its own kind, and hungers after that which is suitable to it, and can never find any peace outside the atonement.

You will see therefore that the atonement is a relative term, that it has relation to sin. Sin has a particular termination, even hell, where God prevents it not (James 1:15). The atonement has a particular termination, that is, in God; and therefore sin is pardoned. It also afterwards has another termination, and that is, the conscience of the sinner; and therefore "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" comes, and "keeps the heart and mind by Jesus Christ." And he to whom the Holy Spirit gives faith, and manifests the precious blood of Christ, must go to heaven. He enters into an experience of reconciliation; and comes to know that God and man are made one in Christ, that all chosen sinners are made one in Christ. The atonement effects miracles. It removes all the disability of sin, all curse and death and guilt, all hardness of heart, and takes away all the distance that sin brought between God and the soul.

This sets before us a wonderful truth; namely, that it is a thing to be known and experienced in time. Yes, this that is in Christ, the precious, eternal blessing of life, must come into the soul in this world sooner or later. God will never be content to be alone, never. He was alone in eternity in His Being, and yet there were Three, and therefore they communicated. Each love the other, Each had infinite delight in the Other. But it pleased this great Jehovah to make the world, and to create angels; He would not be alone. There is in Him that which is communicable, and He will communicate it. He communicated being to the world, to Adam, and to all creatures; and now sin having come and separated between Him and all those men and women created by Him, He makes a new creation, that He may communicate of His goodness to that. If we are part of that new creation, we shall want eternity to love and thank and praise God for His distinguishing goodness. What does the atonement do?

Let us look particularly, as helped, at this. What does the atonement do? It does this. It harmonizes every perfection of Deity with the holiness and happiness of sinners. One breath only is required to say that, yet therein is wrapped up an infinite principle, an infinite goodness; there is wrapped up an infinite principle, an infinite goodness; there is wrapped up a whole creation, a creation to which God will come and manifest Himself, and give Himself, and be in the midst of it; wherein there shall be no sin, nothing that defileth or maketh a lie. My brethren, what a God we have! This great thing that the atonement effected will be ever worthy of the consideration, the searching, the prayerful searching, of all who feel the guilt and burden of sin. Sin that so continually separates between God and us, sin that so sadly mars our best experience, that sadly pollutes us, sin that goes even with our poor prayers, sin that mars every thought, O this bitter thing! It will make your food bitter sometimes, it will be ashes and gall to you, which you will eat with grief in your experience. And yet I am sure there is not a gracious person here who would wish to be relieved of this in anyway but one. No gracious person here would wish to be relieved of the bitterness and heaviness of sin, as it is to be known and is known through the teaching of the eternal Spirit, but by the atonement. O, but out of this grows the praise of God, out of this comes His glory, "glory in the church by Christ Jesus world without end!" God is good, and God's goodness means His justice. People speak as if the goodness of God were that principle in Him that would lead Him to tolerate everything; at least, not to be too severe. Human goodness may prove to be human weakness, but goodness in God is a firm, an eternal principle that forbids His eye to look favourably on sin, a principle that makes the punishment of sin a necessity in Him. Yes, it was necessary that God should punish sin. And this will be the admiration of all to whom it is revealed, that while that principle is maintained with respect to the church, as with respect to all others, yet the punishment does not come on the persons of the elect, but on the Surety. Yes, the Surety paid the penalty. Therefore the first great object of the atonement was God, in the glorifying of all His perfections, and, as I have said, in the harmonizing of them all with the holiness and happiness of His people. O that justice! I remember when it flashed into my conscience. The very beginning with me, if there was a good beginning, was in that particular thing, the awful justice of God, as in His holiness also He was manifested. Poor sinner, you will tremble if ever you see this justice, like a drawn sword ready to pierce you, like an open mouth about to curse you, like a strong hand just about to arrest you, stretched out to arrest you. The justice of God, would a newborn soul wish it less perfect, wish it less immutable? It would be no satisfaction to one possessed of the life of God, to be told that his salvation were procured at the expense of divine justice. We must, as taught of God, maintain this, that God's righteous character as it is exhibited in the law, as it is enforced by the law, must be honoured. And how can it be honoured? Since the creature can do nothing but sin, how can it be honoured? Why, the dear, blessed, glorious Surety, Jesus Christ, came; very God, the eternal Son, volunteered to become Man; He took on Him the seed of Abraham and gave Himself a Ransom, poured out His soul unto death. And so God was the great, the first Object of the atonement of Christ. May the Lord impress this divine truth, stamp it indelibly upon our hearts, that in making the atonement, Christ first of all had before Him the infinite One. He must be honoured, His justice must shine as gloriously in the church as it will shine in another manner in hell.

When the Lord Jesus was serving in that "true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man," then He was serving "in things pertaining to God." Paul teaches this, that a high priest who was chosen from among men was "ordained for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1); thus it is

apparent that God was the first great Object of Christ in the atonement. And is not God the first great Object in your thoughts, as you are taught of the Spirit? Is He not before you at times? Have you not to deal with Him? Does He not deal with you? Is He not the One you would come to? And yet, O the fears about going to Him! How can you? Ought you to go as you are? This is a question. Ought you to go being a sinner? May you go as often nursing wrong things? May you go with all the uncertainty of your mind, all the misgivings of your heart, all the guilt of your conscience, all your ingratitude? May you go to this God? He is first, He makes Himself so; the Spirit makes Him so, and maintains this, He is first. Here the Saviour, serving for His people, comes in: "The Son of man came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a Ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And then, if the Lord but show it to us, we shall see how He served; how He "offered Himself to God without spot" (Heb. 9:14), how His infinitely meritorious offering was accepted of God; and how in that offering all the attributes of Deity were glorified, and had nothing to say, no objection to raise, no word to speak, against the salvation of the lost. There was the first great termination of the atonement. It is worthy of your attention, and if you have faith you will see it is so; it is worthy of all the thought you may be enabled to give to it, and of the prayers you may direct to God respecting it, and for the application of it to your conscience; that Christ came and ministered in that true tabernacle, His own human nature, in things pertaining to God. Always was the Lord before Him, as you read in one Psalm, "I have set the Lord always before Me (Ps. 16:8), set His claims upon Me before Me, set His justice and His truth and salvation, I have set all before Me." So He did the things that pleased His Father.

But now this great atonement must also have another resting place, or termination, inasmuch as it concerns another party; and what is that? Why, you who are blessed with regeneration and with a sense of guilt, this atonement must rest in you. It is to be so; it is God's will, and it is the Spirit's work to bring it there. There it shall rest forever, there it will cover sin, there it will come as a reconciling power, and reconcile you to God. "By whom we have now received the atonement," or the reconciliation. The quarrel is done away, the bitterness of your soul shall be melted away, the guilt of your conscience shall be washed away, the pollution of your thoughts and all your enmity shall be removed, and you a poor, guilty, but now conquered sinner, made willing to be saved by grace, shall be brought into this condition, a reconciled person.

There are many things here that might be noticed. As, first of all, this comes in, that God speaks peaceably, speaks friendly. The very thing you feared could not be, the very thing you desired, now takes place. Some sweet word of the gospel falls upon the heart, some gracious word as a message from heaven, as a light from God, and as the life of God and the peace of God, comes in, and removes all bars and hindrances that were, in your heart's feelings, between Him and your soul. This comes, God draws, receives, speaks to, smiles upon a poor sinner, communicates to him the benefits of Christ's death. That is what it is indeed. This may come without any distinct word being applied, though ordinarily some scripture sooner or later comes to convey the mind of God. But the mercy may come without any distinct word at the time. It is mercy that instantly relieves the soul, relieves it of its fears, removes from it all hard thoughts that may have been entertained of God, and all unjust thoughts and limitations of God. For we do limit Him, as did Israel of old. These things are removed, and God and the sinner are together. Look for communications from God. If He gives you the spirit to ask for them, they will be sure to come. The psalmist wanted them: "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me, I become like them

that go down into the pit" (Ps. 28:1). You know how they go down into the pit: dead, unforgiven, guilty, and polluted; and your soul says, "Lord, do not let that be my case." So He speaks friendly, and this friendly speaking of God effects everything that has been desired. Now sweet, evangelical repentance is felt, now blessed comfort flows in. Now the sinner sees that it is not anything in him; no, not his sincerity, not his prayers, not his tears, not his wishes to be right, but simply and alone the atonement of Christ that has done this great wonder.

"Christ has wrought the mighty wonder:
God and man by Him can
Meet and never sunder."

They meet not on any natural ground, not on the ground of creature ship, but on the ground of the atoning work of Him whose very Person is acceptable to God, and now acceptable to the sinner. This is what is felt. God communicates; yea, He touches the mountains, and they smoke. When He came down on Sinai, there were thunder and lightning; and the voice heard and the smoking mount were so terrible that even Moses, who had such near views of God and such intimacy with Him, said he exceedingly feared and quaked. But when God comes down on Mount Zion, O what a change! A new law issues, new things are said, and matters are revealed, sweetly revealed. The eternal Deity of Christ is believed, His sacred humanity is believed, His vicarious and all-sufficient atonement is believed, and His righteousness is believed; yea, He becomes, as He is said to be, "fairer than the children of men" (Ps. 45:2), to the believing heart. He is as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, admired, delighted in; and all guilty fear and unbelieving shyness being taken away, the soul sits down under His shadow with the great delight, and finds His fruit sweet to her taste. Well my brethren, be this religion mine. Real religion is founded on eternal verities. Real peace comes from Jesus Christ, who "gave Himself a Ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:6).

Now in this great thing there is liberty. We are fond of liberty; it is a great cry among men, and the saints like it, and they get it too. It is said by Christ Himself, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Now this freedom is indeed a great wonder. We talk of liberty, but it is a marvellous thing to know it. It is liberty from many things. You are loosed from the infirmity that has held you down, you are loosed from your guilt; it cannot remain where Christ is. Bunyan tells us that when Christian came to the cross; the burden that was on his back fell off, that which bound it being loosed by the power of the cross; and it rolled into the sepulchre. My friends, this is liberty, the man is free; now that his guilt is gone, he is free from all that quaking and fear and bondage, and he and his God come together. And now communion is felt; because when the bar of guilt is removed, and God speaks, can the sinner be silent? If He bless you, can you refrain from blessing Him? If He says to you that you are His, can you refrain from saying that He is yours? These things always live together in experience. When the Lord comes and speaks to the soul peaceably, the soul speaks to Him humbly, adoringly, and thankfully; you receive the atonement, reconciliation becomes your life, is your experience, it is in your heart, it is felt.

And there is even a wonderful intimacy in this to be mentioned. You have it expressed by Christ where He says to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants" (John 15:15). Now the people of God want to be servants to Christ: the word "servant" means slave, bound to Christ,

tied up to Him. "I call you not servants, but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). That is what He does. Friends open their minds to each other. Mutual confidences pass between them; so, when the Lord calls His people friends, He tells them some things, some things, about Himself, some things about themselves. He tells them of His love: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3); and they tell Him they love Him: "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee" (John 21:17). This communion is a very heart-breaking thing; it makes an impression, a mark never to be erased. It is the love of God made known to the sinner, shed abroad in his heart. It involves everything, so to speak; for he who is loved of God is purchased by God; he to whom the love of God comes finds it comes through the atonement; sooner or later he realizes that that love could never be in his heart but for his being redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is a great thing to have this. Says one, "I wish I knew that the Lord loved me." If you have a heart to ask Him about that, He will tell you one day; for He never teaches a sinner to ask it, without intending to give it to him. He does not mock people. When He teaches a child to ask bread, He does not mock him by giving him a stone; therefore if you are taught to ask this, it will come, must come, in God's own time. And in this friendliness there is freedom. God is familiar with sinners in Christ, and that is the cause of their familiarity with Him. You will never speak to Him familiarly until He speaks to you so. When Joseph said to his guilty brethren, "I am Joseph," they trembled; and well they might, seeing he was lord of all Egypt, and they were guilty of murdering him in their hearts. But when Joseph fell on their necks and kissed them, what then? We read, then they talked with him; he was first. They were poor wretched men, they were guilty of his blood in their intention; and you poor, guilty creature may say, "I have done all that I could against God, it is in my nature, every sin that has been done in the world is, as to its root, in my nature; what can I say? What can I think? What can I do?" And now the Lord comes and puts it all away. It is a sweet experience when, with the freedom that grace gives you, with all the sincerity that the Holy Ghost works, and all the nearness that you are allowed in the Lord Jesus and by His blood, you go on telling the Lord of your unworthiness and your sinfulness, and presenting to Him everything, as you remember it, of your wickedness and your wicked way, until at last He says, "Speak no more to Me of this, I have put it all away, it shall never rise up in judgment against you." This is His manner; and you will say, "Is this the manner of man, O Lord? Is this God's way with me?" The atonement explains it, nothing else could do it; the atonement brings it all to pass in a sinner's experience.

Then also this embraces other things. It embraces temporal matters. Jacob was a reconciled person, and God spoke to him, and when he had been long enough with Laban, told him to go back to his people and his land, and said, "Certainly I will be with thee." "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). You will never lack anything you need, if you are redeemed; and the Lord will let you know it from time to time. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up" to justice and to law and to death, "how shall He," having done the greater, not do the lesser? "How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things" all necessary things? And in that is wrapped up Paul's word: All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours," because you are purchased by Christ's precious blood. What will the Lord deny you, that is for your good and His glory, my dear friends in Christ? Whatever is necessary for the furtherance of His work in you, for the furtherance of His kingdom and His glory, He will be sure to bestow, on the ground of the

atonement. That is the thing. Having received the atonement, you have received everything. It is like a great nugget of gold. God will beat it out in your experience, but you have the whole thing in the atonement. When it is necessary, that temporal good shall come; and when necessary, that temporal good shall be taken away. The Father's rod is here. When He deals with His children as a Father, and sees their disobedience, He does not hate them, does not withdraw His Spirit nor take His love away; does not withdraw their interest in Him, nor His interest in them. What He does is to chasten them. No good thing, not even chastisement, will He withhold from His children that forsake His law.

So all things are yours in this great mercy, this infinitely glorious matter of the atonement. It pacified God, it pacifies the conscience; it appeased justice, it appeases the conscience; it will melt the hardest heart, it will bring peace to the most troubled mind; it will satisfy the most hungry soul, and the largest appetite for God that can be in a creature. For everything that God can give, He gave in Christ; and Christ did everything He could do when He gave Himself; and the Spirit performs His blessed part when He brings the atonement to the conscience. Religion! Many will die in religion, and never reach heaven. But a guilty, weak, and helpless worm, with all the depravity of his life, with all the bitterness of his sin, coming, through the guidance and power of the eternal Spirit, to the atonement, shall find that, though he has no religion to boast of, no religiosity of mind, no goodness to boast of before God and men, the atonement is sufficient. That will present him spotless and without blame before God. Then he will joy in God. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Happy the man who cannot joy in himself! It is bitter to pride, but it is saving to the soul. It is good to say, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear thereof and be glad" (Ps. 34:2). "I will boast in His blood, I will boast in His precious work, I will boast in the access I get to God through Jesus Christ; and I will boast of the grace of the Spirit, that Spirit who has wrought in me this little faith whereby I believe God, and believe in His dear Son; that little faith whereby I cast myself with all my ruin and all my burdens and all my troubles upon the Lord; I will boast in Him and in Him alone." This is the thing, to joy in God only. We read of the "anon" joy of the stony-ground hearer, but this is not it. No, it is another joy, joy of the Holy Ghost, joy of the peace of God, joy of the presence of Christ, joy because the Holy Ghost is in you; and all of it must be traced up to this one thing that is mentioned in the text, this wonderful work, this vicarious atonement of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May this come to us.