

SUBSTANCE OF A SERMON PREACHED BY MR. C. HEMINGTON, AT
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Text: "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." (Rom.v.11)

How does the blessed God commend His love? How does He recommend and set it forth for such poor, hell-deserving sinners as we, and as the whole human race are? The apostle Paul answers in this chapter: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more than, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (verses 8-10). Can anything commend the love of God better than that, or make it more suitable, more acceptable to us as sinners, than that? Nothing, my friends.

To be brought in a spiritual way, and in our own experience to feel that, even when we were ungodly, enemies to God by wicked works - the iniquities and sins of the heart as bad as could possibly be - the blessed God should so have loved us as to give His only begotten Son to die for us! Oh, what love! And, oh, what a way of commending that love! I have, I hope, felt this portion a little upon my spirit today.

Now, by the help of God, I shall endeavour to speak from it in the following way:

First, by touching upon the atonement of Jesus Christ. Secondly, by considering the blessedness of the words of the text as they are spoken by the believer in Christ under the gracious influence of the Holy Ghost.

I. In speaking briefly upon the atonement of Jesus Christ, I will take it up under three aspects.

(1) It exhibits sin. It shows what sin is, and in a way beyond what anything else ever did or can do. And if you ask, In what way does the atonement of Christ exhibit sin? I answer: Here is God, making a vast provision for poor, wretched, miserable, hell-deserving sinners by the most agonizing and the most ignominious death of His dearly beloved and only begotten Son. Oh, what a proof we have here of the greatness and heinousness of sin! What proof of the marvellous love of God in making such a propitiation to put away sin! There is not a sinner in this world that can justly assign the least reason why the great and holy God should not send him to hell. Do

you feel this? Has God brought you to feel that in reference to yourself? I feel, in my most solemn moments before God, that I cannot assign the least reason why my Maker - whose majesty I have so insulted, whose holy law I have so broken, whose name I have in past years so scoffed at and contemned, and against whom every day of my life I have been sinning, (as I stand here in this pulpit tonight I would speak solemnly) - should not pour out the utmost vengeance of His wrath upon me, and upon you too, for our sins in His sight. Has God ever brought you really to feel this?

And there never was a person who trod this earth, so far as he stood related to God in his own person, that ever had a more just claim upon God to save him from divine wrath, and to spare him from a cruel and awful death, than the Lord Jesus Christ. You never had any claim upon God that He should spare you, personally considered, but by the Lord Jesus Christ. I repeat that, as He stood in His own Person related to God, He had a just claim upon God to spare Him from that cruel and awful death. Here is God rousing His hottest indignation against His innocent, meek, harmless, and darling Son, and just because He stood as the substitute and representative of all His people.

(ii) It shows the love of God. The atonement of Christ, above everything else, commends the love of God. In that atonement we see sin in all its awful nature. Nowhere can sin be seen so much as in the sufferings of the Son of God. Go wherever you will, you see the mischievous effects of sin in all departments of God's vast creation. But nowhere can we see it as being so obnoxious to the holy God - that abominable things which His righteous soul so loathes and hates - as in the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we see the awakened and incensed justice and wrath of God roused up to such a climax as was never seen anywhere else. Oh, my friends, here it is that we see the love of God! He is not a malignant God. Carnal men are coming out in our day in the character of atheists and infidels - alas! they are increasing awfully in our nation; and they are presuming to be right and are using the profoundest subtlety and sophistry in publishing their atheistic and infidel conceptions - and they think the God of the Bible to be a malignant Being, though they really believe in no God at all. The atheist says, "There is no God." The infidel tampers with divine inspiration, denying the authority of holy Scripture, trying to prove it to be fallacious, weak, and contradictory. He laughs and sneers at God's holy Word, and thousands there are who think God to be a hard, malicious, vengeful Being. Yes; and let me tell you

that there is at times nothing more common than for these hard thoughts to come into our minds against God; and we know that wicked men are very far from God because of such thoughts. What shall I say, then, as the Lord's servant?

Gos is love. I will say this: God help us to stand more often before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! The eternal Spirit help us to go more frequently to Calvary, to stand at the foot of that sacred hill, and view that face, the meltings of a Father's heart, and the rigorous infliction of divine justice, the pouring out of His boiling hot wrath upon the head of His own Son! And there, with the deepest awe of God upon our spirits, may we ask, What is the meaning of this? What is the interpretation of this profound mystery? And may the Holy Ghost whisper in your heart and mine in the language of the apostle, giving the apostle's words as an answer to our enquiry: "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Can God, then, be a malignant, hard, unfeeling Being? He cannot; it is impossible! The hard and malignant being is the sinner. Every hard thought against God is a lie against His character, an outrage upon His unparalleled mercy in pouring out His wrath upon Christ, that wrath which was due to sinners. "God is love", says the apostle John (I John iv.8). Not only is love an attribute of God, but God Himself, in His nature, essence, and being, is love; and His love is so deep, so mighty, so completely uninfluenced by those who are the objects of it, that it flows out of God's heart by His own special act and fixes itself upon the vilest and the most undeserving of sinners; so that through the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, some of the most abject sinners are justified and saved. God commends His love thus. Remember the scripture I mentioned on Sunday: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John iv.10).

Sovereign love. There was the blessed God before time with His mind occupied, by His own sovereign act, about such poor, worthless things as we are! By His own sovereign act, He chose, He redeemed, and in time quickened us. All our salvation is the effect of divine sovereignty in God's choice, in Christ's redemption, and in the Spirit's regeneration of us. Therefore we are brought to say, with the prophet Jonah, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah ii.9). And we are saved in such a way as is described by David: "Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psa.xxxii. 1,2). The

apostle says, "That He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom.iii.26). How God has commended, in this matchless way of sovereign grace, His love to us poor sinners! This is another aspect of the atonement of Christ.

(iii) It reveals a blessed Foundation. In the atonement of Christ, God has laid a blessed foundation for every poor sensible sinner to plead for mercy. Christ has satisfied God, putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and, in His death, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa.lxxxv.10). The divine law in all its demands is met, and the awful justice of God, through the atonement of Christ, becomes for ever a sheathed sword instead of standing out against a sinner like that flaming sword at the entrance of the garden of Eden after man fell (Gen.iii.24). Observe how the infinite mercy of God harmonizes with the holiness of God, which cannot have a stain upon its unsullied purity. The atonement of Christ lays such a foundation as that every poor sensible sinner, whose heart is broken by the grace of God, may scripturally hope for salvation in Him. This is the gospel, the way of life, not according to the old duty-faith covenant, but according to the covenant wherein God says: "I will put my laws into their mind... I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb.viii.8,10).

Now I do not like to be forced or to feel obliged, at any time or place, to make such an observation as I am about to make; but I often make it because the days which are upon us prove it to be necessary. And that is: Whoever they are that profess to understand and hold, as being their creed, all the things that I have mentioned tonight in reference to the atonement of Christ, and even to make a profession of religion, yet by their lives give very little proof (and some no proof at all) that the atonement of Christ has been savingly applied to their consciences - the devil is deceiving them. There are numbers of such in the present day who are deceived upon this very ground of mere profession of the doctrine.

Even in a public journal (not a religious periodical, but a secular weekly paper) I read some remarks yesterday bearing on this point - and I was struck by such remarks from such a source. The editor had been criticized because of certain ideas which he had thrown out, and he says: "Numbers that pass for sheep will be found with the goats; and some, no doubt, that have been looked upon as goats will be found with the sheep. It is not being members in a church; it is not being

ministers, either conformist or non-conformist, that will make you a sheep or prove that God's word is in your heart. There must be regeneration." I do not know how such a writer stands with God, but such remarks are very true. I am afraid there are such people about us; but just because they stand externally and doctrinally on the side of truth, they will say: "There is plenty of error about. I would not go and hear those Ritualistic clergymen; and, as for the Arminian preachers, I could not sit half an hour and hear them. What they preach would not do for me. I must have a man really sent; I want a man who will go before me and tell me about God's everlasting love, and that the blood of Christ was shed for the vilest of sinners." Ah! but I like to hear a man say this: "God be merciful to me a sinner." This prayer will go into the hearts of God's people, and will distinguish between flesh and spirit. But such as are resting upon mere head knowledge of doctrine stand just as much on a rotten foundation as do those that are thoroughly Arminian. Mere Calvinism will not take you to heaven. You must be a regenerated man; and the man who is quickened and regenerated by God's Spirit is not presented to our notice in the Scripture as being loose and careless, but is one that brings forth fruit unto righteousness. Don't you think I imagine I am perfect - it is very different! I feel what a sinner I am and what a backsliding heart I have. But I thank God He has never left me long to act wrongly. My God always chastises me, makes me groan, grieve, come to Him, and fall at His feet and entreat of Him to restore and forgive me. I have had to do this many times. Dear Mr. Hart says:

"With some the tempter takes
Much pains to make them mad;
But me he found, and always held,
The easiest fool he had" (775)

Oh, how I feel that! But God will deal with us in an out-and-out kind of way. He will look us in the face, and take us according to what we are in His sight; and, if not right with Him as having the atonement of Christ applied to our hearts, He will bring us to repent of our backsliding and will heal up the breach.

II. The blessedness of the Text.

(i) Joy. Now, my friends, having touched upon the atonement of Christ a little, we will consider the blessedness of the words of my text as a child of God is brought to speak when under a gracious experience and under the influence of the Spirit of God. Now, when the atonement is felt, when the hand

of faith is laid upon the sacrifice, when we are brought by God really to feel that Christ has made the atonement for our sins; and when we are brought to feel that we are amongst the saved people of God (I know what I am talking about) - there is joy in this. There is no joy like it. Nothing brings such comfort into a poor sensible sinner's heart as the pardon of sin; of that I am quite sure. The sensible sinner, when he is brought to feel this, has a joy which surpasses all other joys. He will then enter into the spirit of Mr. Hart's words:-

"How high a privilege 'tis to know
Our sins are all forgiven;
To bear about this pledge below,
This special grant of heaven! (107)

This is a treasure rich indeed,
Which none but Christ can give;
Of this the best of men have need,
This I, the worst, receive." (107)

How sacred the moment, how memorable the spot, to some of us, years and years ago, when that took place - when, like blessed Bunyan, we found our burden dropped from our backs and tumbled into the sepulchre of the Lord Jesus Christ! And then we came forth in spirit as Christ's free men filled with the spirit of love which is in Christ Jesus. It made us "free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom.viii.2), and to feel, as Erskine quaintly puts it, "I am not obliged to keep it." I am not married to the law. Martin Luther says: "I am not married to thee, I am divorced from thee. Begone, law! Here's my Master; I am a spouse to Him. I am bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh; I stand in His righteousness, His obedience, His purity, His perfection. In myself I am black; in Him I am comely. In myself less than nothing and vanity; in Him I am comeliness. In the eyes of the Lord I am comeliness because of that comeliness which He has put upon me." Here is joy. No joy like this, my friends!

(ii) The spring of this joy. Just observe the source, the spring of this joy. "Oh", say you, "there is no need to mention that, because the spring is the Lord Jesus Christ." But I say, No; it is not the Lord Jesus Christ. The atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is the effect - the spring is God. The apostle says, "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Before I close, let me briefly call your attention to three particular points mentioned by the apostle in the earlier verses of this chapter.

(i) Faith. The apostle says we are "justified by faith" (verse 1) - that is to say, faith is that spiritual faculty of the new man which, by the grace of God, apprehends justification. It is ridiculous to quibble, as many do, with the punctuation here as to the position of the comma after the word "faith." They say it reads as though justification is procured by faith. But the punctuation is quite right and accords with the Greek. We are justified by faith - not that our faith is the actual procuring cause of justification; that cannot be. The righteousness of Christ is the cause of our justification; our faith is but the instrument. It is the faculty, the eye that sees the righteousness; it is the ear that hears the voice of the good Shepherd. And, unless we hear His voice by faith, and see Him by faith, we shall never get that justification in our experience.

(ii) Peace. Secondly, says the apostle, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." No peace with God upon any other ground! To be at peace with God you must be a just man. God must be able to say: "I can see nothing in that man to find fault with, not a blemish." Why? Because he is in Christ. Therefore, says the apostle, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." God is satisfied. God is not quarrelling with us; there is reconciliation between this great God and the poor worm Jacob. And, says the apostle in our text, "we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."

(iii) Hope of the glory of God. Then, thirdly, we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (verse 2). Nothing less than that! Real hope looks and waits for the glory of God. This is a firm point with me, because the established believer waits not only for salvation, but he waits for the glory of God. There is to me something wonderfully sweet in that. What would salvation be without the glory of God? If I am simply to be delivered from hell, where the devil is, and just go to a place where I could take it easy in the flesh, sit down and say: "I used to fear I should go to hell, but God has prevented that, and now He has put me here" - where would be the glory of God in that? No Christ there! That would be no heaven to me. I believe I should feel so weary that I should long to drop into nonentity. My friends, real hope waits for the glory of God, and that is the highest point to which a created being can be brought. I limit not the Omnipotent, but God cannot raise a created being up to a greater eminence in this world than to cause him to hope for His glory. The full glory of God is obtained through the mediation of Christ; the glory of God will burst out through that mediation; this joy in God will for

ever be the sinner's rest; and in this way the saints of God will be eternally happy.

And then, once more, all this emanated from, had its origin in, the infinite mind of God, and is the fruit and effect of His love, coming down to poor sinners from God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, says the apostle, "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And the child of God, in his sweet moments, says: "What a blessed God is our God! Oh, what mercy, goodness, compassion, wisdom, prudence, power, might, majesty, in our God!" "This God is our God for ever and ever."