

THE OLD, OLD STORY

"In due time Christ died for the ungodly."

Romans 5:6

THERE is a doctor of divinity here tonight who listened to me some years ago. He has been back to his own dwelling place in America and he has come here again. I could not help fancying, as I saw his face just now, that he would think I was doting on the old subject and harping on the old strain. That I had not advanced a single inch upon any new domain of thought but was preaching the same old Gospel in the same old terms as ever. If he should think so he will be quite right.

I suppose I am something like Mr. Cecil when he was a boy. His father once told him to wait in a gateway till he came back and the father, being very busy, went about the city. And amidst his no numerous cares and engagements, he forgot the boy. Night came on and at last when the father reached home, there was great enquiry as to where Richard was. The father said, "Dear me, I left him early in the morning standing under such-and-such a gateway and I told him to stay there until I came for him. I should not wonder but what he is there now."

So they went and there they found him. Such an example of simple childish faithfulness is no disgrace to emulate. I received some years ago orders from my Master to stand at the foot of the Cross until He came. He has not come yet but I mean to stand there till He does. If I should disobey His orders and leave those simple Truths of God which have been the means of the conversion of souls, I know not how I could expect His blessing. Here, then, I stand at the foot of the Cross and tell out the old, old story, stale though it may sound to itching ears, and worn threadbare as critics may deem it, it is of Christ I love to speak of—Christ who loved and lived, and died—the Substitute for sinners, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.

It is somewhat singular but just as they say fish go bad at the head first, so modern Divines generally go bad first upon the head and main doctrine of the substitutionary work of Christ. Nearly all our modern errors, I might say all of them, begin with mistakes about Christ. Men do not like to be always preaching the same thing. There are Athenians in the pulpit as well as in the pew who spend their time in nothing but hearing some new thing. They are not content to tell over and over again the simple message, "He that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has everlasting life." So they borrow novelties from literature and garnish the Word of God with the words which man's wisdom teaches.

The doctrine of Atonement they mystify. Reconciliation by the precious blood of Jesus ceases to be the cornerstone of their ministry. To shape the Gospel to the diseased wishes and tastes of men becomes far more deeply their purpose, than to remold the mind and renew the heart of men that they receive the Gospel as it is. There is no telling where they will go who once go back from following the Lord with a true and undivided heart. From deep to deep descending, the blackness of darkness will receive them unless Divine Grace prevents. Only this you may take for a certainty—

*"They cannot be right in the rest,
Unless they speak rightly of Him."*

If they are not sound about the purpose of the Cross, they are rotten everywhere. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." On this Rock there is security. We may be mistaken on any other points with more impunity than this. They who are built on the Rock, though they build with wood and hay and stubble, and to their sore confusion, for what they build shall be burned, they themselves shall be saved. Now that grand doctrine which we take to be the keystone of the evangelical system, the very cornerstone of the Gospel, that grand doctrine

of the Atonement of Christ we would tell you again, and then, without attempting to prove it, for that we have done hundreds of times, we shall try to draw some lessons of instruction from that Truth of God which is surely believed among us.

Man having sinned, God's righteousness demanded that the penalty should be fulfilled. He had said, "The soul that sins shall die." And unless God can be false, the sinner must die. Moreover, God's holiness demanded it, for the penalty was based on justice. It was just that the sinner should die. God had not appended a more heavy penalty than He should have done. Punishment is the just result of offending. God, then, must either cease to be holy, or the sinner must be punished. Truth and holiness imperiously demanded that God should lift His hand and smite the man who had broken His Law and offended His majesty.

Christ Jesus, the second Adam, the federal Head of the chosen ones, interposed. He offered Himself to bear the penalty which they ought to bear, to fulfill and honor the Law which they had broken and dishonored. He offered to be their Surety, a Substitute, standing in their place and stead. Christ became the vicar of His people, vicariously suffering in their place, vicariously doing in their place that which they were not strong enough to do by reason of the weakness of the flesh through the Fall. This which Christ proposed to do was accepted of God.

In due time Christ actually died and fulfilled what He promised to do. He took every sin of all His people and suffered every stroke of the rod on account of those sins. He had compounded into one awful draught the punishment of the sins of all the elect. He took the cup. He put it to His lips. He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, while He tasted the first sip, but He never resisted and drank on, on, on, till He had exhausted the very dregs. And turning the vessel upside down He said, "It is finished!" And so, at one tremendous draught of love the Lord God of Salvation had drained destruction dry. Not a dreg, not the slightest residue was left. He had suffered all that ought to have been suffered. He finished transgression and made an end of sin.

Moreover, He obeyed His Father's Law to the utmost extent of it. He fulfilled that will of which He had said of old—"Lo, I come to do Your will, O God: Your Law is My delight." And having offered both an atonement for sin and a complete fulfillment of the Law, He ascended up on High. He took His seat on the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool, and interceding for those whom He bought with blood that they may be with Him where He is. The doctrine of the Atonement is very simple. It just consists in the substitution of Christ in the place of the sinner—Christ being treated as if He were the sinner, and then the transgressor being treated as if he were the Righteous One.

It is a change of persons—Christ becomes the sinner. He stands in the sinner's place. He was numbered with the transgressors. The sinner becomes righteous. He stands in Christ's place and is numbered with the righteous ones. Christ has no sin of His own but He takes human guilt and is punished for human folly. We have no righteousness of our own, but we take the Divine righteousness. We are rewarded for it and stand accepted before God as though that righteousness had been worked out by ourselves. "In due time Christ died for the ungodly," that He might take away their sins.

It is not my present object to prove this doctrine. As I said before, there is no need to be always arguing what we know to be true. Rather let us say a few earnest words by way of commending this doctrine of the Atonement. And afterwards I shall propound it by way of application to those who as yet have not received Christ.

1. First, then, BY WAY OF COMMENDATION. There are some things to be said for the Gospel which proclaim the Atonement as its fundamental principle. And the first thing to be said of it is, that in comparison with all modern schemes, how simple it is! Brethren, this is why our great gentlemen do not like it—it is too plain. If you will go and purchase certain books which teach you how sermons ought to be made, you will find that the English of it is this—pick all the hard words you can out of all the books you read

in the week and then pour them out on your people on Sunday—and there is a certain set of people who always applaud the man they cannot understand.

They are like the old woman who was asked when she came home from Church, “Did you understand the sermon?” “No.” She answered, “I would not have the presumption.” She thought it would be presumption to attempt to understand the minister. But the Word of God is understood with the heart and makes no strange demands on the intellect. Now, our first commendation on the doctrine of the Atonement is that it commends itself to the understanding. The wayfaring man, though his intellect is but one grade beyond an idiot, may get a hold on God’s Truth of substitution without any difficulty.

Oh, these modern theologians, they will do anything to spirit away the Cross! They hang over it the gaudy trappings of their elocution, or they introduce it with the dark mysterious incantations of their logic—and then the poor troubled heart looks up to see the Cross and sees nothing there but human wisdom. Now I say it again, there is not one of you here that cannot understand this Truth of God, that Christ died in the place of His people. If you perish, it will not be because the Gospel was beyond your comprehension. If you go down to Hell, it will not be because you were not able to understand how God can be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly.

It is astonishing in this age how little is known of the simple truths of the Bible. It seems to be always admonishing us how simple we ought to be in setting them forth. I have heard that when Mr. Kilpin was once preaching a very good and earnest sermon, he used the Word, “Deity,” and a sailor sitting down below leaned forward and said, “Beg your pardon, Sir, but who’s he, pray? Do you mean God Almighty?” “Yes,” said Mr. Kilpin, “I do mean God and I ought not to have used a word which you could not understand.” “I thank you, Sir,” said the sailor, and looked as if he would devour the rest of the sermon in the interest which he felt in it even to the close.

Now that one unvarnished fact is but an index of that which prevails in every land. There must be simple preaching. A doctrine of Atonement that is not simple, a doctrine which comes from Germany, which needs a man to be a great scholar before he can comprehend it, himself, and to be a still greater orator before he can tell it to others—such a doctrine is manifestly not of God, because it is not suited to God’s creatures. It is fascinating to one in a thousand of them, but it is not suited to those poor of this world who are rich in faith. Not suited to those babes to whom God has revealed the things of the kingdom while He has hidden from the wise and prudent.

Oh, you may always judge of a doctrine in this way. If it is not a simple doctrine, it does not come from God. If it puzzles you, if it is one which you cannot see through at once because of the mysterious language in which it is couched, you may begin to suspect that it is man’s doctrine and not the Word of God.

Nor is this doctrine of the Atonement to be commended merely for its simplicity, but because while suiting the understanding it also suits the conscience. How it satisfies the conscience, no tongue can tell! When a man is awakened and his conscience stings him, when the Spirit of God has shown him his sin and his guilt, there is nothing but the blood of Christ that can ever give him peace. Peter might have stood up at the prow of the boat and have said to the winds, and to the waves, “Peace, be still,” but they would have gone on roaring with unabated fury.

The Pope of Rome, who pretends to be Peter’s successor, may stand up with his ceremonies and say to the troubled conscience, “Peace, be still,” but it will not cease its terrible agitations. The unclean spirit that sets conscience in so much turmoil cries out, “Jesus I know, and His Cross I know, but who are you?” Yes and it will not be cast out. There is no chance, whatever, of our finding a pillow for a head which the Holy Spirit has made to ache, save in the Atonement and the finished work of Christ. When Mr. Robert Hall first went to Cambridge to preach, the Cambridge folks were nearly Unitarians.

So he preached upon the doctrine of the finished work of Christ and some of them came to him in the vestry and said, “Mr. Hall, this will never do.” “Why not?” said he, “Why, your sermon was only fit for old women.” “And why only fit for old women?” said Mr. Hall. “Because,” they said,

“they are tottering on the borders of the grave and they want comfort, and, therefore, it will suit them, but it will not do for us.” “Very well,” said Mr. Hall, “you have unconsciously paid me all the compliment that I can ask for. If this is good for old women on the borders of the grave, it must be good for you if you are in your right senses, for the borders of the grave is where we all stand.”

Here, indeed, is a choice feature of the Atonement—it is comforting to us in the thought of death. When conscience is awakened to a sense of guilt, death is sure to cast his pale shadow on all our prospects and encircle all our steps with dark omens of the grave. Conscience is accompanied generally in its alarms with the thoughts of the near-approaching judgment. But the peace which the blood gives is conscience-proof, sickness-proof, death-proof, devil-proof, judgmentproof, and it will be eternity-proof. We may well be alarmed at all the uprisings of occupation and all the remembrance of past defilement, but only let our eyes rest on Your dear Cross, O Jesus and our conscience has peace with God and we rest and are still.

Now we ask whether any of these modern systems of divinity can quiet a troubled conscience? We would like to give them some cases that we meet with sometimes—some despairing ones—and say, “Now, here, cast this devil out if you can try your hand at it,” and I think they would find that this kind goes not out except by the tears and groans and death of Jesus Christ the atoning Sacrifice.

A Gospel without an atonement may do very well for young ladies and gentlemen who do not know that they ever did anything wrong. It will just suit your lackadaisical people who have not got a heart for anybody to see—who have always been quite moral, upright and respectable—who would feel insulted if you told them they deserved to be sent to Hell. It would suit just fine all those who would not for a moment allow that they could be depraved or fallen creatures.

The Gospel, I say, of these moderns will suit these gentle folks very well. But let a man be really guilty and know it. Let him be really awake to his lost state, and I declare that none but Jesus—none but Jesus—nothing but the precious blood can give him peace and rest. These two things, then, commend us to the doctrine of the Atonement, because it suits the understanding of the most lowly, and will quiet the conscience of the most troubled.

It has, moreover, this peculiar excellency, that it softens the heart. There is a mysterious softening and melting power in the story of the sacrifice of Christ. I know a dear Christian woman who loved her little ones and sought their salvation. When she prayed for them, she thought it right to use the best means she could to arrest their attention and awaken their minds. I hope you all do likewise. The means, however, which she thought best calculated for her object was the terrors of the Lord. She used to read to her children chapter after chapter of *Alleine's Alarm to the Unconverted*.

Oh, that book! How many dreams it gave her boy at night about the devouring flames and the everlasting burnings. But the boy's heart grew hardened, as if it were annealed rather than melted by the furnace of fear. The hammer welded the heart to sin but did not break it. But even then, when the lad's heart was hard, when he heard of Jesus' love to His people, though he feared he was not one of them, still it used to make him weep to think Jesus should love anybody after such a sort. Even now that he has come to manhood, Law and terrors make him dead and stolid—but Your blood, Jesus, Your agonies in Gethsemane and on the tree—he cannot bear. They melt him—his soul flows through his eyes in tears. He weeps himself away from grateful love to You for what You have done.

Alas for those that deny the Atonement! They take the very sting out of Christ's sufferings. And then, in taking out the sting, they take out the point with which the sufferings of Christ pierce and probe and penetrate the heart. It is because Christ suffered for my sin, because He was condemned that I might be acquitted and not be damned as the result of my guilt—it is this that makes His sufferings such a cordial to my heart—

*"See on the bloody tree,
The illustrious Sufferer hangs,
The torments due to you,
He bore the dreadful pangs;
And cancelled there, the mighty sum,
Sins present, past and sins to come."*

At this present hour there are congregations meeting in the theatres of London, and there are persons addressing them. I do not know what their subjects are, but I know what they ought to be. If they want to get at the intellects of those who live in the back slums, if they want to get at the consciences of those who have been thieves and drunkards, if they want to melt the hearts of those who have grown stubborn and callous through years of lust and iniquity, I know there is nothing will do it but the death on Calvary, the five wounds, the bleeding side, the vinegar, the nails and the spear. There is a melting power here which is not to be found in all the world besides.

I will detain you yet once more on this point. We commend the doctrine of the Atonement because, besides suiting the understanding, quieting the conscience, and melting the heart, we know there is a power in it to affect the outward life. No man can believe that Christ suffered for his sins and yet live in sin. No man can believe that his iniquities were the murderers of Christ and yet go and hug those murderers to his bosom. The sure and certain effect of a true faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ is the purging out of the old leaven, the dedication of the soul to Him who bought it with His blood and the vowing to have revenge against those sins which nailed Jesus to the tree.

The proof, after all, is in the trial. Go into any parish in England where there lives a philosophical Divine who has cut the Atonement out of his preaching and if you do not find more harlots and thieves and drunkards there than is usual, write me down mistaken. But go, on the other hand, into a parish where the Atonement is preached, and that with rigid integrity, and with loving earnestness—and if you do not find the ale-houses getting empty, and the shops shut on the Sunday, and the people walking in honesty and uprightness—then I have looked about the world in vain.

I knew a village once that was perhaps one of the worst villages in England for many things. Many an illicit still was yielding its noxious liquor to a manufacturer without payment of the duty to the Government and, in connection with that, all manner of riot and iniquity were rife. There went a lad into that village, and but a lad, and one who had no side down, and in a short time the little thatched Chapel was crammed and the biggest vagabonds of the village were weeping floods of tears and those who had been the curse of the parish became its blessing.

And where there had been robberies and villainies of every kind all round the neighborhood, there were none, because the men who did the mischief were themselves in the House of God, rejoicing to hear of Jesus crucified. Mark me, I am not telling you an exaggerated story now, nor a thing that I do not know. Yet this one thing I remember to the praise of God's Grace, it pleased the Lord to work signs and wonders in our midst. He showed the power of Jesus' name and made us witnesses of that Gospel which can win some, draw reluctant hearts, and mold the life and conduct of men afresh.

Why, there are some Brethren here who go to the refuges and homes to talk to those poor fallen girls who have been reclaimed. I wonder what they would do if they had not the Gospel tale to carry with them to the abodes of wretchedness and shame. If they should take a leaf out of some divinity essays and should go and talk to them in high-flowing words and philosophies, what good would it be to them? Well, what is not good to them is not good to us. We want something we can grasp, something we can rely upon, something we can feel. Something that will mold our character and conversation and make us to be like Christ.

II. Secondly, one or two points BY WAY OF EXHORTATION. Christian man, Christian woman, you believe that your sins are forgiven and that Christ has made a full atonement for them. What shall we say to you? To you first we say, what a joyful Christian you ought to be! How you should live above the common trials and troubles of the world! Since sin is forgiven, what matter what happens to you now? Luther said, "Smite, Lord, smite, for my sin is forgiven. If You have but forgiven me, smite as hard as You will." As if he felt like a child who had done wrong and cared not how his father might whip him if he would but forgive him. So I think you can say, "Send sickness, poverty, losses, crosses, slander, what You will, You have forgiven me and my soul is glad and my spirit is rejoiced."

And then, Christian, if you are thus saved, and Christ really did take your sin, while you are glad, be grateful and be loving. Cling to that Cross which took your sin away. Serve Him who served you. "I beseech you therefore, Brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Let not your zeal bubble over with some little bubble of a song. You may say—

*"I love my God with zeal so great,
That I could give Him all,"*

but sing it not in words unless you mean it. Oh, mean it! Is there nothing in your life that you do because you belong to Christ? Are you never anxious to show your love in some expressive tokens? Love the Brethren of Him who loved you. If there is a Mephibosheth anywhere who is lame or halt, help him for Jonathan's sake. If there is a poor tried Believer, try and weep with him, and bear his cross for the sake of Him who wept for you, and carried your sins.

And yet, again, Christian, if this is true that there is an atonement made for sin, tell it, tell it, tell it. "We cannot all preach," you say? No, but tell it, tell it. "I could not prepare a sermon." Tell it—tell the story—tell of the mystery and wonder of Christ's love. "But I should never get a congregation." Tell it in your house—tell it by the fireside. "But I have none but little children." Tell it to your children and let them know the sweet mystery of the Cross, and the blessed history of Him who lived and died for sinners. Tell it, for you know not into what ears you may speak. Tell it often, for thus you will have the better hope that you may turn sinners to Christ.

Lacking talent, lacking the graces of oratory, be glad that you lack these and glory in your infirmity that the power of Christ may rest upon you—but do tell it. Sometimes there are some of our young men who get to preaching who had better hold their tongues. But there are many others who have gifts and abilities which they might use for Christ, but who seem tongue-tied. I have often said that if you get a young man to join a rifle corps, he has got something to do and he puts his heart in it. But if you get the same young man to join a Church—well, his name is in the book and he has been baptized, and so on—but he thinks he has nothing more to do with it.

Why, Brethren, I do not like to have members of the Church who feel they can throw the responsibility on a few of us while they themselves sit still. That is not the way to win battles. If at Waterloo some nine out of ten of our soldiers had said, "Well, we need not fight. We will leave the fighting to the few. There they are. Let them go and do it all." Why, if they had said that, they would very soon have all been cut in pieces. They must every one of them take their turns, horse and foot and artillery—men who were light-armed and men of all kinds. They must each march to the fray. Yes, and even the guards, if they are held back as a reserve to the last, yet they must be called for, "Up guards and at 'em."

And if there are any of you here that are old men and women and think you are like the guards and ought to be spared the heavy conflict, yet up and at them! For now the world needs you all, and since Christ has bought you with His blood, I beseech you be not content till you have fought for Him and have been victorious through His name. TELL IT! TELL IT! TELL IT—with voices of thunder tell it. Yes, with many voices mingling together as the sound of many waters—TELL IT! TELL IT till the dwellers in the remotest wilderness shall hear the sound!

Tell it till there shall be never a cot upon the mountain where it is not known, never a ship upon the sea where the story has not been told. Tell it till there is never a dark alley that has not been illuminated by its light, nor a loathsome den which has not been cleansed by its power. Tell out the story that Christ died for the ungodly!

With a few words of application to unbelievers I draw to a close. Unbeliever, if God cannot and will not forgive the sins of penitent men without Christ taking their punishment, rest assured He will surely bring you to judgment. If, when Christ, God's Son, had imputed sin laid on Him, God smote Him—how will He smite you who are His enemy and who have your own sins upon your head? God seemed at Calvary, as it were, to take an oath—Sinner, hear it!—He seemed, as it were, to take an oath and say, “By the blood of My Son I swear that sin must be punished,” and if it is not punished in Christ for you, it will be punished in you for yourselves.”

Is Christ yours, Sinner? Did He die for you? Do you trust Him? If you do, He died for you. Do you say, “No, I do not”? Then remember that if you live and die without faith in Christ, for every idle word and for every ill act that you have done, stroke for stroke, and blow for blow, vengeance must chastise you.

Again, to another class of you, this word. If God has in Christ made an atonement and opened a way of salvation, what must be your guilt who try to open another way—who say, “I will be good and virtuous. I will attend to ceremonies. I will save myself”? Fool! You have insulted God in His most tender point, for you have insulted His Son. You have said, “I can do it without that blood.” You have, in fact, trampled on the blood of Christ and said, “I need it not.” Oh, if the sinner who repents not is damned, with what accumulated terrors shall he be damned, who, in addition to his impenitence, heaps affronts upon the Person of Christ by going about to establish his own righteousness. Leave it—leave your rags, you will never make a garment of them! Leave that pilfered treasure of yours. It is a counterfeit. Forsake it. I counsel you to buy of Christ fine raiment, that you may be clothed, and fine gold that you may be rich.

And consider this, one and all of you, oh my Hearers! If Christ has made atonement for the ungodly, then let the question go around, let it go around the aisles and around the gallery and let it echo in every heart and let it be repeated by every lip—“Why not for ME?” and “Why not for ME?” Hope, Sinner, hope! He died for the ungodly. If it had said He died for the godly, there were no hope for you. If it had been written that He died to save the good, the excellent, and the perfect, then you have no chance. He died for the ungodly. You are such an one. What reason have you to conclude that He did not die for YOU?

Listen, People. This is what Christ says to you—“Believe and you shall be saved.” That is, trust and you shall be saved. Trust your soul in the hands of Him who carried your load upon the Cross. Trust Him NOW. He died for you. Your faith is to us the evidence, and to you the proof, that Christ bought you with His blood. Delay not. You need not even stay to go home to offer a prayer. Trust Christ with your soul NOW. You have nothing else to trust to—hang on Him. You are going down. You are going down. The waves are gathering about you, and soon shall they swallow you up and we shall hear your gurgling as you sink. See, He stretches out His hand. “Sinner,” He says, “I will bear you up. Though Hell's fiery waves should dash against you, I will bear you through them all, only trust Me.”

What do you say, Sinner? Will you trust Him! Oh, my Soul, remember the moment when first I trusted in Him? There is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents, but I hardly think that is greater joy than the joy of the repenting sinner when he first finds Christ! So simple and so easy it seemed to me when I came to know it. I had only to look and live, only to trust and be saved. Year after year I had been running about here and there to try and do what was done beforehand, to try and get ready for that which did not want any readiness.

Oh, happy was that day when I ventured to step in by the open door of His mercy, to sit at the table of Divine Grace already spread and to eat and drink, asking no questions! Oh, Soul, do the same! Take courage. Trust Christ and if He casts you away when you have trusted Him—my soul for yours—as we meet at the bar of God, I will be pawn and pledge for you at the Last Great Day if

such you need. But He cannot and He will not cast out any that come to Him by faith. May God now accept and bless us all, for Jesus' sake! Amen. Amen