

SERMON XL

CHRIST ALONE OUR MERCY SEAT

Tobias Crisp

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." {I Jn.2:1,2}

We have considered already the office of Christ here spoken of, his advocate-ship; the cause he manages, and also the persons whose cause it is. The cause he manages is in behalf of the sins of his people; and the persons are not present believers only, but all elect persons, though yet unbelievers. We further considered the qualifications of Christ unto this office. 1. He is Christ; that is, called of God unto it, and furnished by God for it. 2. He is Jesus; he takes no cause in hand, but he saves his client. 3. He is the righteous; the efficacy of the plea of Christ lieth in this righteousness of his, that being the sole hinge upon which it turns. In the opening of this unto you; negatively, the plea that prevails for the discharge of sin, is not our works; no, nor our faith, but the righteousness of Christ only; and affirmatively; there is an active righteousness of Christ, for "by the obedience of one man, many shall be righteous," {Rom.5:19,} and the passive righteousness of Christ, as "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." {I Jn.1:7} But it is the divine righteousness, or dignity of the Divine Godhead that adds an efficacy, and virtue, making the active and passive righteousness of Christ a complete righteousness, that we might be complete in him; and we gave a touch to you, wherein the efficacy of the plea of this righteousness stands; as it stands in the satisfaction that righteousness hath made to the justice of God. In judgment there are but two ways to be quitted, either just proof, that the person upon trial is not guilty; or being guilty, the law is already satisfied. The strength of the plea of the righteousness of Christ, insists not upon the first way; he grants the persons whose cause he pleads, had, for matter of fact, done the thing that is charged; but the strength of it is, that the law on their behalf is satisfied already. This latter plea being good, hath the like force for acquittance and discharge as the former, so that the sentence of judgment can no more pass upon the person for whom the law is satisfied, than it can upon persons that never transgressed it.

Now it remains to be considered, by way of objection out of the premises, how this can be, that the justice of God should be satisfied, seeing this is bringing a recompense to answer, in proportion for the offence committed; the ground of the objection is, all that Christ, as man, brings unto God, comes short to make a recompense. I told you before, that the divine righteousness is that which makes this righteousness complete, and that a mere human righteousness is not able to effect, till it be infinite, or be made infinite by the divine righteousness.

Now, when Christ brings recompense to the Father for the transgressions of men, that which he brings to him should not be that, which was his own before now, whatever the divine righteousness is, that is God's own; the active and passive obedience of Christ's human nature, is brought to him, but not the divine righteousness.

You will say, this is just as one man owes another an hundred pounds, and he sues him for it; the debtor, he cannot raise above ten pounds of this money; but the creditor must make it up out of his own purse. So then, here is the ground of the objection, and the truth is, this matter contains in it the depth of the mystery of the gospel; that justice should be satisfied by bringing a recompense for transgression, and yet that, as it is brought, is not so much as will answer the injury that is done of itself. It is true, there is enough in the divine righteousness, to make the satisfaction for the injury done; but how is this divine righteousness brought?

It is most certainly true, where there is satisfaction of justice in this case, there is also mercy; for though God be just to forgive sins, yet you shall find, that where the apostle speaks of justice in this act of forgiveness of sins, he speaks of mercy too. You know, to forgive a thing is an act of grace and mercy; yet, even while there is forgiveness, justice is manifested, and takes its course.

But this, you will say, doth not resolve the question where can there be a satisfaction of justice, seeing there is not brought, by way of recompense, that which is proportional to the injury done.

1. Justice is satisfied in the strictest sense, when there is such a plenary and equivalent recompense given, that the person injured thereby, is in a good estate every way as he was before the injury done; when a man is trespassed against, and sues for this trespass, and the man makes up, and brings in as much recompense as the injury cometh to; so that the party trespassed, is worth as much as he was before; here is a plenary satisfaction of justice. Now comes in the objection, and says, that the justice of God cannot be said to be satisfied, because the active and passive obedience of Christ, as human, bring not in so much to God as the injury comes to; and what is from the Godhead, is God's own before.

2. Therefore some say, that there is a satisfying justice properly, though there be not a full recompense, as in every point to answer the injury done; I will give you a familiar illustration of it, that you may not say, it is an unknown, and an unheard of thing, that justice is satisfied, though no plenary recompense, in the former sense, for satisfaction be brought. Suppose one man murder another; now, for a plenary recompense to the injury done, he that is slain must be in statu quo prius, {in the same state as,} that is, must be made alive again; and till he be restored to life, here is not a complete recompense made. But, how is it possible, that any man that hath committed murder should make this full recompense to the person that is injured? He cannot restore life to him again; and, yet for all this, though he cannot bring in a full recompense in this way, he may properly satisfy justice; for, if life answer for life, if the murderer be executed, the law and justice may truly be said to be satisfied. Here then, there may be satisfaction of justice, and yet not the fulness of recompense in the strictest sense brought in. Justice, I say, is satisfied in this respect, because, here is as much brought in by way of recompense, as is possible to be had. Beloved, you have a proverb, "where there is nothing to be had, the king must lose his right;" and when a man pays all that ever he hath, he can pay no more, he satisfies justice. In this sense, justice is said to be satisfied, when the law is satisfied; and so the satisfying of justice doth not necessarily imply the fulness of recompense in the strictest sense, according to the injury done. How cometh it to pass, when a murderer is executed, that upon his execution only, the law esteems this to be a recompense, and justice to be satisfied, though it does not answer the injury done; but only as it answers to the law, that is the rule of justice, so it is satisfaction even so, the justice of God is truly satisfied, when the will and pleasure of God is fully fulfilled, whether or not there be a bringing in a full and plenary recompense. If the will and pleasure of God be satisfied concerning transgression, that is the satisfaction of the justice of God. Now, what is the will of God? It is this, that in the day that man sins, he must die; either in person, or by deputation; for among men the satisfaction of the law is made, either in the man's own person that is the debtor, or his surety that pays the debt for him. The law in some cases looks more upon the thing that is brought in to answer to it, than it doth upon the person that brings it. The justice of God looks upon the fulfilling of his will, although it be not by the same person that sinned; this alters not the nature of the thing, whether I myself pay the debt, or another for me, the payment is satisfactory, so in that the will of God hath its utmost bounds for the satisfying of justice, whereas transgression must be recompensed with death. Now, Christ, the Surety of his people, going under the punishment, and fulfilling it, the law is satisfied, because every tittle of it is fulfilled, and there is nothing in it remains to be answered.

3. But, I say further, that the satisfaction of Christ is complete, even in the strictest sense, though it be granted, that the bare sufferings and righteousness of the human nature cannot effect it, without the divine nature, and the righteousness thereof; and whereas it is urged that the righteousness of the divine nature, is God's own already, it is granted; and that both, because it is

essential unto him, and communicable to the creature; therefore, and also, for the reasons alleged before, in the objection, it cannot be formally, either the whole, or any part of our righteousness; yet, notwithstanding the divine nature, and so the divine righteousness, by the hypostatical union, fit and furnish Christ to be an all-sufficient Saviour, and Satisfier, that thereby the person of Christ is so glorious, that his active and passive obedience is made of infinite worth and value, to give satisfaction for us; and that, in the strictest sense, making a perfect reparation, and of all things in the behalf of the elect, for whom he undertakes, and brings upon them salvation to the uttermost.

In brief, beloved, though there may be some hint given for your better understanding, by way of illustration, how justice may be satisfied, yet the truth is, the fullest resolution wherewith persons ought to sit down without further dispute, is not by argumentation, but by divine faith. Suppose we could not find the bottom of this principle, that God's justice should be satisfied; yet we may sit down as fully resolved that it is, though you know not how, in that the Lord reveals to us, he is satisfied; whose word must be more to us, than all demonstrations can be by way of argument; that here Christ is said to be the propitiation for our sins; that God himself acknowledges elsewhere, that he is satisfied. What matter is it to me, how he is satisfied? I mean, in respect of resolving me by way of argument, how it is, his own word speaking it and resolving it to us, is that with which we should sit down with, without further dispute. If therefore, you cannot know how he is satisfied, your believing upon the testimony of God's word that it is so, may be as full satisfaction to you; yea, may be, a more full resolution to your spirits, than all arguments and demonstrations can be.

And, so I come, to the last clause of the text; namely, the issue of this advocate-ship of Christ in the behalf of his people when they sin, which is, "he is the propitiation for our sins." The words contain the conclusion of the plea of Christ, telling us what it comes to, that by it he becomes the propitiation for our sins. The main thing to be considered here, that we may understand aright our portion in this grace, is to know what this propitiation means, or what it is for Christ to be a propitiation. Beloved, there is abundance of marrow and fatness in this very word, and, I doubt, much of it is lost, in respect of sense and comfort, for want of understanding the extent of it; that you may the better therefore dive into the mystery of this propitiation, you must understand, that the word, in the original is of the same signification with the word the Septuagint translation uses, when they interpret the Hebrew word, that is rendered mercy-seat; "he is our propitiation," that is, he is our mercy-seat. And if you would know what it is for Christ to be our mercy-seat, look into Lev.16:14-16, where you shall find the main end for which this was erected by the Lord; for, of all those ordinances that the Lord established among the Jews, this mercy-seat was the uppermost. "And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the veil, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat; and he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins; and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness." Now, you find three things especially appropriated unto the mercy-seat.

1. The sweet incense that none ought to make upon pain of death, but Aaron alone, must burn upon the golden altar every morning before the mercy-seat.

2. The most notable of all the rites and types of the Jews, was to be prepared before the mercy-seat; the type of the scape-goat with the live-goat, as you find there handled at large. The live goat must be brought before the mercy-seat, and Aaron must lay his hand upon the head of it, and then the scape-goat must be sent into the wilderness, and carry the sins of the people into a land of forgetfulness.

3. At the mercy-seat, as it is in Exod.30:6, the Lord appointed to meet with Moses, and there speak graciously unto him; and there God will hear him speak, and will be heard to speak, and return his gracious answer at the mercy-seat. "And thou shalt put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee." Well then,

to come to the business in hand, that I may clear it the better; Christ is our mercy-seat, that is, the incense, or the sweet savor that smells with acceptance and delight in the nostrils of the Lord; that which makes a sweet savor is the mercy-seat. Incense, had it been burned anywhere else, but here according to the appointment and commission of the Lord every morning; the very place itself being changed, would have taken away the savor of the incense before the Lord; therefore, the mercy-seat is that, for which the incense becomes a sweet savor; as much as to say, all our prayers, duties, and services, {notwithstanding our sins, being believers,} become as a sweet savor to the Lord, as they are presented up before the mercy-seat by Christ; he is the propitiation then, that is, it is he by whom our persons and performances become a sweet savor to the Lord. Again, the scapegoat, and the live goat to be slain, were to be prepared before the mercy-seat; as much as to say, our sins are carried away into a land of forgetfulness, by virtue of Christ; as the scape goat being presented before the mercy-seat was made a type capable to carry away the sins of the people into a land of forgetfulness; so that as we are presented unto God, in and through Christ, our sins are carried by Christ into a land of forgetfulness.

Lastly, before this mercy-seat the Lord appeared, and at it God will return his gracious answer; as much as to say, in Christ and through him, the Lord returns all the gracious answers to his people upon earth; not a voice of grace, peace, and comfort, is to be heard, but at the mercy-seat; for, mark it well, you shall find God hath made over all that gracious language of heaven unto his Son Christ; and only unto him, there came this voice from heaven, when he was baptized, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." But upon the mount, the voice was a little more plain; for there it saith, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear him;" as much as to say, all the grace I have to speak to men, I have put it into the mouth of Christ my Son, and not a voice is to be expected of grace from me, but as it cometh out of his mouth; there is not a word of comfort to be heard, but as it is spoken from the mercy-seat; so that putting these three things together, in respect of the sacrifice of the scape-goat, the text in Leviticus telling us of an atonement that is made by the presenting of this sacrifice before the mercy-seat.

In a word, the sum of all is that in and through Christ our Advocate, we become a sweet savor to the Lord; that there is an atonement made with him for us, our sins being carried into a land of forgetfulness; and, in Christ, he speaks all the gracious language of heaven to us. Now, whereas at this mercy-seat the special thing intimated unto us, is the atonement that is made, it seems, that propitiation hath reference in the signification of it, to that; as when a man desires one that is at variance with him, to be propitious; that is, would admit of a propitiation, or atonement. Now, that you may know what atonement is, and so propitiation likewise, look into Rom.5:10,11. "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." Reconciliation, what is that? Mark what follows; "and not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." You see he makes a proposition, by way of supposition, "if when we were enemies," &c; and, in the next words, proves that there is reconciliation, or rather shows the fruits of it, being obtained, "we joy," saith he; in what? In him, "by whom we have received the atonement." What is that? Atonement, in this place, is the reconciliation which Christ makes between God and persons; so that propitiation indeed, runs at last into this cistern, namely, reconciliation with God; and herein lieth the efficacy of the plea of Christ, for his people committing sin; he is the mercy-seat, the propitiation, the atonement, or reconciliation. This is the issue of it; when Christ pleads for the discharge, this pleading produceth reconciliation between God and men. If we could but dive into the mystery of reconciliation between God and us, we should then find the comfort of this office of Christ to be a propitiation for us.

Now, if you will know what this reconciliation is which is indeed an interpretation of propitiation; observe, how the apostle illustrates it. "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." {Eph.2:13} Reconciliation is making nigh those, who were sometimes afar off. Look into Col.1:21,22, where the apostle there tells you, in what respect the members of Christ, the elect, are said to be afar off. "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled; in the body of his flesh through

death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight." So then to be afar off, and so afar off to be made nigh, is as much as to say, that persons alienated in respect of enmity in their minds, by wicked works, notwithstanding all that enmity, are made nigh, they are reconciled. You know well, in respect of men, who are elect, they are from all eternity in the purpose of God, made nigh by the virtue of the blood of Christ, that in time should be shed; which virtue is effectual in the eyes and thoughts of God from all eternity; so that though, in respect of the nature of wicked works, there be a separating and an alienating, yet in regard of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, being in force with God, the elect are nigh to him in purpose, from eternity. So that alienation and estrangement, in respect of enmity against God, is not to be understood, as if elect persons were in very deed, and properly, at any time decreed to be separated absolutely from God; no, he had them in his thoughts, as the objects of his love, from eternity; and these thoughts of being nigh, were intended to be executed through the blood that was continually in his eye; the apostle's meaning is, you, who so far as you wrought wicked works, had that in you, which in its own nature was the cause of alienation, and could not admit of your being near, till there was reconciliation made; that is, whereas these wicked works did, in their own nature, actually, and for the present, make you walk at a distance from God, and so in respect of them, were afar off, you are now made nigh by the blood of Christ. Christ hath taken away sin, the cause of that distance between God and you, and also hath revealed himself unto you, being believers; and in doing this, hath made known to you his eternal counsel, concerning your reconciliation; and that now you are actually, and really, in the very bowels of God; and also he, in some measure, subdues and destroys the power of Satan in those wicked works; so that there is now more nearness, in conversation with God, after calling and believing, than there was before; and the blood of Christ is that which makes persons, who were far off, nigh again to God. And this is the reconciliation, namely, whereas there was a distance before, there is now a nearness, and this by the blood of Christ, as by a sacrifice of propitiation.

That you may the better understand the nature of reconciliation with God, you must know, that it properly imports, that whereas there is variance and estrangement, a person is then said to be reconciled when the breach is made up, and the controversy is ended, the quarrel is done, and persons become friends again. You know, as long as there is hitting in the teeth, a secret grudge, objecting one against another, and persecuting one another, in respect of injuries done, there is no reconciliation. When men are reconciled, they lay down the bucklers, quarrel and fight no more, but walk as friends together. And if they should walk as friends in outward semblance, and yet bear rancor in their spirits one against another, this were but an hypocritical reconciliation. In reconciliation, the very heart itself is made friends with persons reconciled. All this imports unto us thus much, Christ is become to believers the atonement; one that makes peace with God, ends the controversy and quarrel between God and them; whereas God was injured, and might have prosecuted the law with violence upon us; Christ brings to pass, that the Lord lays down the buckler, to have no more to say against a person, but to become friends with him. You know, that reconciliation is such a thing as is not only a making friends today, but so, that there may be a continuation of this amity. You cannot call this reconciliation when men are brought together, and their controversies are ended now today, but upon the same will fall out again tomorrow, here is not reconciliation; for, in reconciliation there must be a burying of all that which was the subject and matter of the quarrel. So Christ being our reconciliation, he making our peace with God, doth not bring God to be friends with us today, so as to fall out with us tomorrow again, but to be friends with us forever.

Therefore, by the way, know that every person reconciled unto God by Christ is not only a person become a friend of God now, but forever; and as Christ takes away the present wrath of God against him today, so all quarrels and controversies forever; so that a person reconciled shall never have God at controversy any more with him. Some, it may be, conceive Christ reconciles God and us in respect of sins that are past; but if we sin anew, say they, God must have new controversies, and new quarrels. But beloved, remember that Christ bore all iniquity at once upon him; and when he made reconciliation with God, he brought in all the transgressions of believers, from first to last, and so ended the quarrel with God, in respect of everyone, even for sins future, as well as past. He dealt

so with God, that he reconciled him to you in respect of them; so that Christ most either leave out those sins you think breaks peace with God, or if not, then that reconciliation as much concerns those sins, as other transgressions already committed. Now, think whether of these be true doctrine, either that Christ should leave some sins out that are brought again into controversy, and so God again begins to fall out with persons for them; or whether he made agreement for all, and all comes into reconciliation. Therefore, I say, suppose two men are at variance, they have a hundred actions one against another; a friend comes in to make up the business between them; he brings in every one of these hundred actions to this agreement; he deals so with them, that all the controversy between them, in respect of all these actions, shall die; and so he makes them friends. Now, I ask, when all actions are brought into the agreement, may these men fall to quarrelling and suits of law for any of them? They cannot do it; beloved, if Christ brought in all the transgressions of his people into the agreement, and they were all satisfied for by him, "his blood cleanseth from all sin," as saith the apostle; how cometh it to pass, that God should again fall out, and be at controversy with men, for any of these sins that were in the agreement in that reconciliation made? Therefore, know, for your everlasting consolation, that there is nothing that shall be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ, or make a breach between God and you, who are his people. Every sin which, in its own nature indeed, makes a breach, is taken into the agreement that Christ made with the Father; and if there should be such an objection rising in your hearts, when you have committed a sin, now God is at controversy with me for this, ask your hearts this question; was this sin brought into the agreement of reconciliation, or was it left out? Did God accept of the reconciliation when this transgression was in the agreement? How can he then fall out again for this that was in his thoughts when reconciliation was made? But this may seem to be but discourse only, and therefore take a view of some passages of scripture, whereby you see, as clear as light, that God's reconciliation to men is one entire and simple act; this being once made, there is no more quarrel and controversy that God should prosecute persons reconciled. In Daniel 9:24, there is a time mentioned of making reconciliation; you therein see the effects that accompany it; I have heretofore recited other effects, "seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city," for what? "To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." Observe it well, when reconciliation is made, then there is an end of the matter that bred and fed the controversy and quarrel. When there is a controversy of God against a person, it must spring from his sins; but when reconciliation is made, there is a finishing, and a putting an end to sin. Take away the cause and the effect vanishes of itself; but observe the text a little more to show the unchangeableness of this reconciliation, when made, there is, saith he, "brought in everlasting righteousness." Righteousness, as you have heard, is that which begets, feeds, and preserves peace and reconciliation with God. So then this fountain of righteousness must be drawn dry, before the peace that is made by it can be wasted. How comes it to pass that a lamp goeth out, but because the oil is wasted that feeds it? So the righteousness of Christ is the oil that feeds the reconciliation made; either this must be spent, or the lamp of peace cannot go out; but, saith the Holy Ghost, there is brought in upon reconciliation "everlasting righteousness;" so that it is clear, when God reconciles himself to persons, they are reconciled forever to him.

Consider also that excellent expression, Isa.54:9,10, "for this is as the waters of Noah unto me; {saith the Lord;} for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee." The very express words show the excellent qualities of that reconciliation that is produced by the bringing in of a better covenant there spoken of.¹ Mark it well, I beseech you, for there are admirable expressions in it; the thing God

¹ The meaning is, that God's dispensations towards his people at the time the prophecy refers to, is like that of his to Noah and his family; and the love he bears to them is like that love which he bare to them; and the Covenant he has made with them, is as the Covenant that he made with him. The love of God to his people is an everlasting love; it always continues, it never did, nor never will depart, notwithstanding their fall in Adam, their depraved

proclaims is that he will not be wroth, and fall out any more with his people; and this he confirms by an oath, and what can be more binding than the oath of God?

Again, take notice of the continuance of this; how long will not he be wroth, nor rebuke? Even so long as floods shall cease to drown the world. God hath sworn, that till the world shall be drowned with water again, he will not be wroth with his people. As long as water shall not come upon the earth, nay, longer, if longer may be; "the mountains shall depart, and the hills shall be removed, but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee;" as much as to say, the loving-kindness of God shall remain steadfast to the people reconciled to him, even longer than the mountains shall stand fast, and the hills un-removed; this, I say, is established by such a firm covenant and oath, and out of the mouth of so glorious a God, that the hearts of his people may be secure that he will not be wroth with them.

But, whereas some may say, the Lord, in verse 7, says, "in a little wrath have I hid my face for a moment;" therefore, it seems, it is not to be taken for such a perpetual forbearance of wrath. Consider, that all along this chapter, the prophet speaks of the church of God, in a two-fold estate; he speaks to it one while as it is a wife of youth, and another while as her breasts are grown; as a wife of youth, so the Lord for a moment hid his face; but as a wife that is grown up, so he will not be wroth with her, nor rebuke her any more. The apostle Paul most excellently expounds this different estate of the church, in the time before and after Christ, Gal.4:1-5. There was, {saith he} a time of minority, wherein, even an heir, being but a child, differs nothing at all, in respect of outward carriage, from a servant, though even then he be lord of all; and this time of being a servant, is not forever, saith the apostle, "but till the time appointed of the Father." Here in respect of outward usage, during this minority, there is no difference between such a person, and him that is not an heir at all, but he is under tutors and governors; that is, he feels alike the rod, and still this is till the time appointed of the Father. See how the apostle expounds the words, "even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world." We did partake of the common calamities of the world, but how long was this? "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." There was a redemption, even in the minority of the church; when it was at the youngest age, there was redemption, but not in respect of that which he speaks of here; that was a redemption from that condition, wherein the heir did not differ from a servant; therefore, most properly, according to the coherence of the words, the redemption, spoken of here, was from a condition wherein they did not differ from servants, into a condition wherein they should differ. So Isaiah 54:8, there is such a difference in this two-fold estate of the church, as is between a wife of youth, and a wife grown up. What is that, you will say? You know, even among men, they marry children when they are but two or three years of age; the child is a married wife, and yet, for all this, while she is four or five, yea, six or seven years of age, she is used as one that is not married; there is no difference between this child, and one that is not married; but when she cometh to riper years of age, and hath the actual fruition of her husband, then she cometh to be freed from the rod, and receiveth all the immunities and privileges of a wife, which she, though a wife, did not enjoy before; and so in this text, the church, as a child under age, and a wife of youth, is visited for a moment, and there is a kind of hiding the face of God, while she is as the wife of youth; but when the time of riper age is come, then "this is as the waters of Noah unto me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee." Thus, beloved, you see that God, once reconciled, never falls out with his people any more. It is true indeed that he chastises them, but he never doth it in wrath and fury. In Isaiah 27:4, speaking of his church, that he would watch night and day, he saith, "fury is not in me;" the Lord hath no acquaintance with fury, in reference unto such persons; and therefore, although it be true there may

state by nature, their actual sins and transgressions, their many revolting and backslidings; though the Lord may hide his face from them and afflict them, still he loves them; whatever departs from them, his kindness shall not. Gill.

be afflictions, and those exceeding tart to the flesh, even when a person or church is grown up; yet there is not wrath in these afflictions.

"Every son {saith God} I love, I rebuke and chasten." {Rev.3:19} There is love even in chastisements, and the fruit of it is love, to take away sin. The end why God sends these afflictions is not in wrath for sin, but to purge them from their filth. God takes occasion, when his people sin, to chastise them in love; but that chastisement is no fruit of the wrath and curse of God, nor sentence of the law, but the tender compassions of a loving Father, that makes use of them for his children's good. There is as much reconciliation with God under the rod, as when not under it; a father may love a child as dearly when he corrects him, as when he gives him plumbs. It is thus with God, to children reconciled to him, as he corrects a child committing a fault, he never whips him but there is fear he will commit it again; and therefore he chastises him to prevent a fault; he doth not punish him to pacify his anger for the fault committed. So God, in respect of the church, for the purging of it, and for trial in these respects, will chastise, and in chastising will convey the spirit of amendment to them; but, in respect of what is done, were it not to have them purged for the future, he would never afflict his people for that which is past. So that, though this be the great objection that troubles men's spirits, they fall daily into afflictions, here is wrath and enmity; reconciliation is not firm; God is now fallen out; yet, beloved, know, that God is not fallen out with his people when he chastises them. No man can suffer under afflictions, more than Christ himself did; yet, saith God, he is my beloved Son, not my hated Son, but my beloved Son, whom I afflict. It is true, indeed, as the apostle Paul speaks, "now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." {Heb.12:11} Consider this one thing; can God pour wrath when he only intends the good of his people, to purge and bring them as gold out of the fire? Certainly, what David had experience of, shall be the fruit of all the afflictions of all the members of Christ, though they be never so many and great, "before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word." {Ps.119:67} Whereupon he saith, that it was good for him that he was afflicted. God afflicts to teach, to draw home, to refine and purge. You know, the merchant doth not in wrath fling away his gold, when he puts it into the refining pot; it is no argument of less love, only he would have his gold tried and refined, and the dross taken away out of it. It is so with God; all the members of Christ, all that he hath prevailed for with the Father are the beloved of the Father, and the darlings of his soul; and his love ceases not, nor diminishes when they are under the rod.

One word of application, and I shall have done. Is it so, that Christ is such an advocate, that having such a strength of plea in his righteousness, he produceth such a good issue, as to bring, at the last complete reconciliation? In a word then, you know what to trust unto for your soul's discharge and comfort. "In many things we sin all;" and what should uphold your spirits that your sins should not sink your souls? Here is held out unto you that great supporter, the righteousness of Christ, Isaiah 41:10, "fear thou not;" and why not; "for I am with thee;" "I am thy God;" and "I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." If you go anywhere else for support, when sin is committed, your sins will sink you and swallow you up; for nothing can bear you up in respect of the weight of sin, but the right hand of his righteousness; that alone is the thing that must uphold your spirits, or nothing can do it. Oh that the Lord would be pleased to work upon your spirits, to betake yourselves to this support, and to fix your spirits upon the fulness of support and strength, that is in this righteousness of his! When the Israelites were stung by the fiery serpents, it was not the applying of a plaster that could heal them, nothing but the brazen serpent. Oh, look upon the brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus Christ; look not upon any other plaster but him, to heal your wounded souls, stung with the serpent of your sins; though they may serve for other uses, yet they have not so much virtue in them, as to heal the sting of sin. Fix your eyes here, cast yourselves here, rest here; let the weight of your souls lean here. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." {Mk.16:16} "All thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established." {Is.54:13,14} "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." {Is.7:9} Oh, go not to Christ, as if there were not enough in him to

answer your transgressions; that you must carry something else with you to him, that may be a help to your discharge; if ever discharge from heaven come unto your spirits, it is only the hand of Christ, by his Spirit, that must bring it down to you; and nothing can do it, but that discharge, as it is recorded in the word of grace. In things that come by relation unto men, and so are opened unto them, how can men be satisfied concerning the truth of the thing reported, but upon the credit of him that is the reporter? Let a man tell me never so good news, if I do not believe him, my spirit is not satisfied.

So, concerning the discharge from sin, beloved, you hear it related from heaven; "we have an advocate," and "he is the propitiation for our sins." Now, there is no way to know that there is such a thing as an advocate and propitiation, but as it is revealed from heaven. The apostle John indeed reveals it here; if he had delivered it merely as he is man, so it had occasioned suspicion and doubting; but as it is the revelation of the Holy Ghost, and of Christ himself by the apostle, so we are to stick close unto it, and we shall find rest unto our souls, as we can credit the report of it; therefore, as the Lord will work upon your spirits, take up your rest where it is to be found; so your souls shall lie down and sleep in peace and safety; you shall sing and leap for joy; and you shall have all peace and joy in believing. O that men would keep up the dying language of a martyr, "none but Christ, none but Christ," in matters of faith and stability of spirit; of peace of conscience, as well as of salvation. And so I shall commend this word to the grace of God, in respect of the issue thereof, upon your spirits.