

Andrew Bonar:

#### THE HELP AFFORDED BY CHRIST'S PERSON TO A SOUL SEEKING TO KNOW SIN AND THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION.

Many of the early fathers use the word "theology," in the sense of "A discoursing upon the Divinity of Christ," and they called the apostle John "the Divine," or the Theologue," because he speaks so fully of the Word made flesh. To these Fathers all knowledge of God seemed comprehended in knowing Him who reveals the Father. And following their principles, we maintain that all real knowledge of God's salvation is to be attained by becoming acquainted with Him who is the Saviour sent of God.

In the days of the Reformation, we find Fox, the martyrologist, telling Roman Catholics that, "as there is no gift of God given to man, no virtue, work, merit, nor anything else, that is part or cause of salvation, but only this gift of faith to believe in Christ Jesus" - so also "neither does faith, as it is only a bare quality or action in man's mind, itself justify, unless it be directed to the body of Christ crucified as its object, of whom it receiveth all its virtue." \*

\* Oliver Cromwell, in his day, writes to General Fleetwood : - " Faith as an act yields not perfect peace, but only carries us to Him who is our perfect rest and peace."

In all ages of the Church, to know "Whom we have believed" has been felt to be all-important. In whatever light we view the matter, its importance will appear.

#### 1. It helps us to discover the malignity of sin.

Right views of sin have a tendency to lead us to right views of the Person of the Saviour. But the converse also is true; right views of the Saviour's person lead to right views of sin.

Socinians and Arians have shallow views of sin. They do not see that it deserves never-ending woe and infinite fierceness of wrath; nor do they feel their conscience alarmed at the enormous depravity of nature, and at the fearfully aggravated sins against God which they daily commit. Hence they see not the need they have of a Divine Saviour - one able to bear infinite wrath for the innumerable sins of a multitude whom no man can number.\*

\* The Elect - those given to Christ by His Father from eternity - His sheep - are not few in number, but "many." God out of his mere good pleasure, looking on a world where all alike were already ruined, elected "many" to everlasting life. Isa. liii. 12, "He bare the sin of many." Matt. xx. 28, "Ransom for many;" xxvi. 28, "My blood shed for many." Rom. v. 15, "Many shall be made righteous." Electing love has laid hold of an innumerable multitude, and drawn them out of the many waters, putting every sin of every one of them on the Almighty's Fellow, the man Christ Jesus, and imparting to them the grace given them in Him before the world began. (1 Tim. i. 9.) They are conscious that if it required the personal interposition of a divine surety to remove it, the sin must be very great; that it must indeed be branded as hateful beyond conception, if, ere it be forgiven, the Lawgiver himself must die. From these men, therefore, we learn to judge thus ; - that if we would feel the enormity of sin aright, we must see it calling for no less a satisfaction than what could be given by God Incarnate.

The Roman Catholic, whose eye turns oftener far to the Virgin Mary than to Mary's Son, has not surely felt the true nature of sin, the rigour of the law, or the terror of divine judgment. Hence, such men are content to seek pardon through a creature's merits, and think that the intercession of a multitude of such creatures may prevail for them. But did they see sin under the teaching of the Spirit they would trust their pardon to no one but the God-man, Christ Jesus. And in point of fact, when Romanists are awakened by the Holy Spirit to deep sense of sin, they forthwith begin to feel how insufficient, how unsatisfactory, how incomplete is any kind of peace that does not come from the Incarnate Son of God. They begin to see sin to be such an evil as only God can remedy. From these, therefore, let us learn to judge thus; - it is in Christ, the Son of God, substituted for the sinner, that we see the abyss of evil in our sin, and that we become aware that sin is so clamorous for wrath as to be silenced only by the interposed Person of the Son of God.

But turn aside again; approach an infant newly born, drawing its first breath in this fallen world. There is sin in that soul, and small as the sin may seem when compared with that of sinners who have lived forty or seventy years, yet even the sin of that infant is such an evil as nothing can remedy but the blood of the Son of God. If the sin of that infant is to be forgiven, the Son of God must "pour out his soul unto death" in its behalf.

Set before you any one of your own acts of disobedience, selecting those which may, in your judgment, appear the smallest and slightest. Yet that act was sin; - such an act that, ere it can be forgiven and you received into favour, Godhead must be moved! God the Son must rise from His place on the Father's bosom and haste to your rescue. Less than this would be insufficient; less than this would be entirely useless. For the abyss is bottomless. No angel's strength could bear the burden of the wrath due to your one sin, while certainly no angel's love could endure the trial of interposing as your substitute. Sin is something that only God can deal

with - a mysteriously tremendous evil.

These lessons are taught us when we fix our attention not on the mere blessing of forgiveness, but also on the Person who brings it. If we were to adopt another plan too commonly pursued, and merely speak of salvation as a work done and finished well - or as a door opened at which the vilest may come in - or as a free invitation to the chief of sinners - we might in that case miss altogether the clear light cast on sin by the Gospel. But on the other hand, connect all with the Person (and in this case with the divine nature of the Person) - show that here is the work of God in our nature, God occupying our law-room - that here is the door of access opened, but only in consequence of Almighty love shedding the blood of the Beloved Son, heaven's Isaac - that here is a free invitation to the vilest, but that it is thus free only because the Saviour who came was Creator of all creatures, and therefore able to fulfil all conditions, and pay the last mite - show all this, and forthwith the light of the cross is cast on sin, and you see it to be an infinite evil, an evil understood by God alone.\*

\* "Who can set forth the riches of His death, and the unfathomable abyss of His sufferings? The inexpressible evil of sin appears here more clearly than if we saw all the misery of the damned" (HOWELL HARRIS, Lett. 43). Such is the heat of wrath against sin, that unless the "shadow" which interposed between me and that heat had been the broad, far-extending shadow of a "Great Rock," the air around me would have burnt as an oven still. Such is the burden of sin on my single person, that never could I have been lifted up as a "lively stone," and my weight borne by the foundation-stone, unless the foundation had been God the Son. Surely, then, it was a gaping wound that sin had made, when such balm alone could heal it. O my soul, thou wert sinking fast in the swelling stream, and none could beat back the might of the wave but God, God in thy nature. A whole Christ was needed by thee, and that Christ, God ! - "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts viii. 37.)

## 2. The application of Salvation.

A sinner may see that there is none other to whom we can go but Jesus only, and yet he may not go. He may imagine difficulties, and magnify these into impossibilities. But it is remarkable how many of these difficulties and apparent impossibilities flow down at the presence of the Person of the Lord - the soul beholding a full Saviour in Him who is God and man in one person. Clement of Rome (" whose name is in the Book of Life," Phil. iv. 3), writes to the Corinthians,\*

\* In an Epistle still preserved and reckoned genuine.

"Brethren, in our thoughts of Jesus Christ we ought to conceive of Him as God, and the Judge of quick and dead. We ought not to cherish low thoughts of Him who is our Saviour; for if our thoughts of Him are low, we will hope for little at His hand." This truth admits of wide application. A soul very deeply convinced of sin, or indeed convinced of sin at all as an awful reality, will find no object fit for its necessities but the person of God-man, associated with all he did. It was thus with a minister who lies buried in Bunhill Fields, Mr. Bradford. He was for a time an Arian, but was awakened to feel that he must be born again, while writing a sermon on the words of Christ to Nicodemus. He felt sin in its power; he saw his sins to be innumerable, as well as inexpressibly heinous. "And now," says he, "the first relief I felt was from the view that Jesus Christ was GOD. His deity I now saw as the ground of all my confidence." No wonder! for it is there we see how the atonement could be sufficiently precious to avail for sinners such as we; it is only there we see how the Holy One could find a sacrifice for us pleasing and acceptable, and admitting of the widest application.

But, in cases where there is a tacit assent to the doctrine of the Person of Jesus, there is often a real and practical overlooking of it. Often the deeply exercised soul looks at all else rather than the Living One Himself - thinking of his ways, purposes, work, but shutting its eyes on Himself. Now, let that soul be led for a time to deal with the Person, and the effect will be marvellous, if the Holy Spirit enable him to see who this Person is.

"How am I to cross that mountain ?" says an anxious soul, pointing to the doctrine of electing love. "How am I to find myself among the number of the elect?" "And," says another, "if you cannot assure me that the blood of Christ was intended as much for me as for Peter or Paul, Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany, how can I rest on it?" Another, yet more bold, comes forward and declares that "if Christ did not die alike for all men, and bear all sinners alike on His heart when He died, then there is no truth sufficient for a sinner seeking salvation to rest upon."

Now, to all those travellers who would willingly (if they could) find out that there is no such mountain as electing love, because they fancy it is an insuperable one, we say at once, the Person of the Lord Jesus stands in front of that glorious mountain whose top touches heaven; and you have to do with His Person ere you set a foot on that mountain.

Our warrant for believing in Christ is simply this, that He cries to the children of men, "To you, O men, I call." And he bids them ALL come in the first place to HIMSELF. Come and see this Person. (Prov. viii. 2.) "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink" (John vii. 37). "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden" (Matt. xi. 28) - ye that are toiling up that mountain with a load on your souls that almost crushes you at every step.

All your difficulties about election are thus set aside for the time - set aside until you have found Christ Himself,

"who will show you plainly of the Father" in due time. All your difficulties about election are in this manner transferred to Christ Himself, who it is (and not we) that must reconcile the universal call with His special love to His elect. Well, be content to leave the difficulty with Jesus; and meanwhile deal with a personal Saviour, not with words, and doctrines, and propositions. Say, if you will, "Perhaps I am not elected, and if so it will be in vain for me to expect a place among His redeemed" - say this, if you will, but only go and see. Go to the Person, of the Christ, and throw thyself at His feet.

Now, you do throw yourself at Christ's feet, when, letting alone for the time all these thoughts of election and the inquiry whether you are or are not in the Book of Life, you allow your soul to think of Christ Himself. Will Christ Himself refuse a coming sinner? He cannot; for it is written, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). He will not say that He has not a price sufficient to pay for you. He will not say that the foundation is not broad enough for you to build on. He will not say that he has not love sufficient to lead Him to have compassion on you. You may not be able to make out from some of Christ's words whether or not there be room for you; but try Christ's heart - appeal to Him as one "who receiveth sinners" - and tell Him that such a sinner are you.

Never forget the Syrophenician mother's dealing with the Lord. It is a case recorded as if on very purpose for such a state of soul as yours. This woman came, full of desire and hope, but was told, "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Was not this confronting her at once with the darkest shadow of the highest height of the mountain of Election? It seemed to say, "There is no place for you." It did not leave her an opening (as there is in your case) to say, "Possibly I am in the number" - it seemed to deny that she was thought of at all. If ever there was a trying case it was here. But how did this woman act? She did not try to prove, as some do in our day, that there was not, and could not be, such a thing as special electing love - but she left that difficulty to be solved by the Lord Himself, and threw herself upon the Person of Jesus. She renewed her appeal to Himself "Lord, help me." "Truth, Lord, but the dogs (and such am I) under the table eat of the crumbs." She probed His heart; she believed there were depths of mercies there; and she found she was right! She has left us a proof that when a sinner repairs to the Person of the living Saviour, that sinner is at once met by Him; and the gracious colloquy begins - "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. i. 18); and it will end with nothing less than absolution, "Though your sins have been as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they have been red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Believest thou this? In believing this, thy soul shall find acceptance with God; and in the same hour, thy Lord will let thee know that He had thee in His heart from eternity. It is thus that an anxious soul's stumbling on the difficulty of election may become a real advantage. It guides the soul away from a thing to a person. His first question now is not, What does Christ think of me? But, What am I to think of Christ? The traveller is confronted by the frowning mountain-height, and this leads him at once to discover, ere he climbs even one height, the Person to whose dwelling he imagined he must come by long and laborious efforts. Boldly encounter the question, "Am I one of God's elect? Am I one given to Christ by the Father from all eternity?" It will lead you directly to the Person of Jesus, as the only mode of reaching a true and sure solution. It will send you not to the Book of Life, but to the Lamb who writes it; and in asking about Him, you find that He has singular love to sinners, and that "He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him" (Heb. vii. 25).\*

\* It is thus in general that little children rest on Christ. With little theology, they know and feel that this is He who died for sinners. Their faith is like that of Old Testament saints; it is the sheep resting on the shepherd's shoulders, with little knowledge of how he saves them.

Is this not enough?

We may here take occasion to observe that a fresh view of His Person, especially in its human aspect, seems, from the Gospels, to be the Lord's way of removing the after fears of His own. We find that the Lord when on earth used to remove fear by revealing Himself. On that memorable night of storm, when wind and waves tossed the vessel, and darkness had spread its thickest veil over moon and stars, Jesus walked on the waters and approached them. The thought that it was "a Spirit" (Matt. xiv. 26), or angelic messenger (it might be some one of the "ministering spirits"), was no consolation to men who at that hour were ready to perish, and who felt worthy to perish. They saw nothing in an angel's presence but what might remind them, by contrast, of their own unholiness; and they knew nothing of the depth of an angel's compassion. But no sooner did Jesus speak, "IT IS I," than there was a calm in their souls, such as the after-calm on the surface of the lake was but an emblem of: "It is I!" I am here! was all He said. But they knew His heart as well as hand. They knew His love to them, unworthy as they were. They knew His sinner-love - His love to men. And why should we not have this same remedy for our anxieties? The living Jesus - Jesus full of human sympathies and divine glories!

It was so again after the Resurrection. In Luke xxiv. 36-47, we read of the scene. The disciples had lately sinned, and were not as yet altogether at rest. When, therefore, one enters the Upper Room who seemed to be from the other side of the Veil, they are sore afraid - as if tidings from that side must be evil tidings to them, and as if a holy angel, even a holy ministering "spirit," must have been sent on some errand of reproof or judgment. But it was the Lord! and He lifted up His voice with the salutation, "Peace" - man's salutation taken up by the

God-man's lips into which grace is poured. And then He drew all their attention to His Person, as not that of an angel, but of one who had "flesh and bones - that is, who had man's nature. He showed them "hands and feet; " - the hands that had so often touched the sick to heal them, and been laid on themselves to bless them ; - the feet that for them had been weary on the highways of Judea and Galilee, and had got no rest till they touched the cold stone of Joseph's sepulchre. "Why are ye troubled?" said He, as if to recall the night of the last supper: "Let not your hearts be troubled" (John xiv. 1-26). "And why do thoughts arise in your minds ? " - thoughts or disputings as to who this was. He hastened yet farther to show them His true humanity - that He was the God-man, the Lord of glory, who put on their very nature; for He asked for fish and honey-comb, and did eat with them as a guest at their board.

No wonder that (v. 24) they were so full of joy at the very possibility of His very self being there, so full that they could scarcely allow themselves to believe it. But they show us in what manner immediate calm is to be found; and true rest from anxiety; they show us the real removal of questionings and troubles, and the simple means of being filled with joy unspeakable. The streams from Lebanon furnish it all! The Person of the God-man presents thoughts, and declares truths, and reveals feelings towards us, such as may well cause a soul to cry, "All my springs are in thee!" He did not come saying, "Peter, I love thee;" "Bartholomew, I love thee," "And I love thee, Thaddeus," "And thee, Philip " - but He took a way which made all of them feel more than even if He had done and said this very thing, He presented among them Himself in His humanity! Lo! (as if he had said) Lo! I am among you, the Incarnate God, whose love has led me to be man's Redeemer. Handle me and see! Draw out of this well - wherein is love not only to you, Peter, and to you, Bartholomew, and to you, Thaddeus, and to you, Philip - but to "a great multitude whom no man can number," out of every kindred, and tongue, and people. Draw from this Well and thirst no more.

"He that hath ears to hear let him hear." To have rejected the Saviour - to have slighted Him - to have refused to make Him welcome, on the pretext of imagined difficulties, will be as the "worm that never dies" to your soul! And further we say, to have received less than the Person of Him who died and rose again - to have been satisfied with mere propositions and statements, with mere doctrines and truths, instead of embracing in your heart the very Person to whom all these referred will be to you the "worm that never dies" - a subject of endless regret in eternity, when regret is unavailing. You are like a man laying himself to repose on the bosom of a cloud, on the white down of the ocean's foam. Oh, the misery of the soul that is content with a shadow instead of substance ! - content with a vague belief that there was a sort of general love and mercy to all, and a kind of general vindication of righteousness and moral government, instead of taking the full, ample soul-filling and conscience-filling atonement, - salvation. for him by means of such a personal substitute as the Lord Jesus, the Son of the Highest !

What is "Wrath to come," if, to avert it from sinners, the Lord Jehovah rose from His throne! But on the other hand, where is the possibility of perishing if a sinner accept Him who has come ? Yonder is the baring of. the Almighty's bosom, proclaiming, "Yet there is room." Yonder is an ocean-depth of love, which even Manasseh has not yet fathomed - yonder is an atmosphere of love to the height of which even Paul has never soared! And (herein indeed is love!) we may taste it, each for ourselves! It is the bosom on which even we may for ever rest.