

Atonement – Cover But No Cure

John 16:7-8 [NIV] *“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, **the Counsellor** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. **When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment:**”*

Christ sent the Holy Spirit after He left this earth to be our High Priest at the Father’s right hand. Part of the Holy Spirit’s work would be to expose the guilt of sin to the world [of which we all are a part].

Why?

We do not see the need for a Saviour until we are convicted of our sin.

Having done this part of His work the Holy Spirit is able to become our “*paraklētōs*” [consoler, advocate, comforter, intercessor].

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Counsellor** to be with you for ever, **the Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for **he lives with you and will be in you**. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you.**”*

What will having the Holy Spirit guiding our lives bring us?

John 14:26-27 [NIV] *“But the **Counsellor, the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, **will teach you all things** and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you**. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

Peace of mind, which is a great comfort.

Isaiah 40:1 [NIV] *“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.”*

Isaiah the servant of God was sent by the Holy Spirit to comfort the people of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 40:2 [NIV] *“Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.”*

By telling them that their sins had been paid for, and the time of harsh correction was over.

Every true servant of God should follow this pattern set by the Holy Spirit.

Show the people their sins and then bring them comfort through the understanding of the victory they can have over sin and evil through the blood of Jesus Christ their Saviour to be “*helpers in their joy*”.

Isaiah 58:1 [Jerusalem Bible] *“Shout for all you are worth, do not hold back, raise your voice like a trumpet **to my people** proclaim their rebellious acts, to the house of Jacob, their sins.”*

Quote from Matthew Henry’s Commentary.

*“**Conviction must prepare for comfort**. God had appointed this prophet [Isaiah] to comfort His people [Isaiah 40:1] but he appoints him also to convince them and show them their sins.*

*1 **He must tell them how bad they really were**. He must deal faithfully and plainly with them. Though they are called “the people of God” and “the house of Jacob”, do not flatter them, but show*

them their transgressions, what sins are committed by them that they do not acknowledge to be sins, though in some things they are reformed, in other things they are still as bad as ever.

2 **He must “cry aloud, and not spare”** not spare them, though he get their ill-will by it and get himself an ill name, yet he must not spare.”

Hebrews 12:4-8 [NIV] *“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, **do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.**” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? **If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.**”*

To be corrected by God through His Ministry shows how much He loves His children. Discipline is part of the discipling we need.

Isaiah 58:2 [NIV] *“For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.”*

Here is a description of a group of people who are very religious.

They are regular church attenders, observe daily prayers, love to hear good preaching, delight to hear of God’s way [as did King Herod, who heard John the Baptist gladly **John 6:20**] but for all their religious ritual these people had a problem, God was ignoring them.

Isaiah 58:3 [NIV] *“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ “Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.”*

Even when they afflicted their bodies with fasting, God still took no notice of them even their “*day of fasting*” [day of atonement] they were **not** pleasing God.

Why?

God says that they found self-satisfaction in their fast.

Fast days were solemn occasions when the whole community gathered.

This was good in itself, but it was also dangerous, for it created an impression of piety which was often far removed from the real state of affairs.

At its worst it could degenerate into self-righteousness, which is a sign of hollow thinking, lacking integrity and lacking the spiritual power of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

This is the inevitable outcome when leaders fail to speak out to God’s people about their sins and fail to challenge them with the ongoing need for repentance.

2 Timothy 4:1-5 [NIV] *“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: **Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction.** For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. **They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.** But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”*

This was the solemn charge Paul gave Timothy to help the Christians he served avoid becoming self-righteous.

Isaiah 58:4-5 [NIV] *“Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. **Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself?** Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?”*

These people seem to take great pleasure in the exercises of religion, delighted in approaching God **not** for His sake but for the pleasure of the day, the fellowship with others like-minded.

They were inquisitive concerning their religious duties, the rules of piety in the worship of God.

They appeared to the outside world to be a group of righteous people and they delighted in such a reputation.

Yet internally there was strife, and their religious piety had little or no effect on how they treated others outside their fellowship on a day-to-day basis.

The implication of all this is that far from being an atonement [cover] for their sins, their action and attitude was an aggravation of their sins, because of their hypocrisy.

Their problem was the same as that of Cain.

Genesis 4:1-8 [NIV] *“Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time **Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? **If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?** But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”** Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.”*

Cain desired to worship God in his own way, offering what he personally had laboured to produce.

Cain would **not** accept his total dependence on a blood sacrifice, which was for him a shadow of what would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Nothing is said in scripture about Adam’s sacrifice.

Adam had personally seen what God had done to cover his and Eve’s nakedness, the result of their rebellion against their Creator.

A blood sacrifice for a replacement of the vegetable covering Adam had used.

Abel and Cain undoubtedly had been told of this event and how their disobedience had caused their expulsion from the paradise of the Garden of Eden.

Yet Cain deliberately disobeyed God and sought to worship God in his own way but still expected God to accept his sacrifice of vegetables the product of his own works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 [NIV] *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, **not by works**, so that no-one can boast. For we are God’s*

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Isaiah 58:3 [NIV] *“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? **Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’** ‘Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.’”*

The thought behind this statement was the same as Cain’s, **they believed that God was obliged to hear them because of their fasting.**

Luke 18:9-14 [Message Bible] *“He [Jesus] told His next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: ‘Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people, robbers, crooks, adulterers, or heaven forbid, like this tax man. **I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.**’ Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, ‘God, give mercy, forgive me, a sinner.’”*

Jesus commented, “This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face, but if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”

God is looking for a humble attitude not a ritual fasting, spiritual affliction not bodily affliction.

Fasting only has value if accompanied with a humble amending of our way of life, that is repentance.

How then should we afflict our lives?

Isaiah 58:6 [NIV] *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”*

We afflict ourselves by adopting a lifestyle in which self-indulgence and greed are totally given up and replaced by generosity towards the poor.

This change must be on the spiritual as well as the physical level.

All that is wrong in this world, that is mentioned in this verse can be traced back to Satan.

Satan the instigator of sin, holds this world captive to sin and blinds all humans to the reason for the wickedness and oppression they see all around them.

How do we overcome this enslavement?

Revelation 12:10-11 [NIV] *“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;** they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.’”*

By using the two tools that God has provided.

1 **The sacrifice of Jesus Christ**, we allow the Holy Spirit in and through us to convince people of their sin and their need of a Saviour.

2 **We then use the Word of God, the Christian Bible**, and our own example of a changed life to draw people into a fellowship with Jesus Christ.

This will defeat all that Satan is doing in society.

But this will be a dangerous thing to do for Satan will hate us for our actions.

Revelation 12:12 [NIV] *“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because **the devil** has gone down to you! He **is filled with fury**, because he knows that his time is short.”*

Satan will bring persecution [affliction] on us.

Only people who have the level of commitment as to *“not love their lives so much as to shrink from death”* will be effective in this conflict with Satan.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

We have to make this **total commitment, a total sacrifice** of our time and wealth.

This is the affliction [fasting] that God will accept as a spiritual act of worship, God will **not** now accept a physical ritual.

Isaiah 58:7 [NIV] *“Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”*

Share the only food that really satisfies our hunger, the words of Jesus Christ.

Lead others to have their spiritual nakedness covered with Christ’s righteousness.

Do not turn away from serving other human beings who also are *“flesh and blood”*.

Isaiah 58:8-10 [NIV] *“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. **Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.** “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.”*

God will see and act on such afflicting of our lives in a powerful way by manifesting Himself in our fellowship.

Fasting has to be linked with outreach to those who are enslaved by Satan otherwise it is rejected by God as self-righteous hypocrisy.