

SERMON XVIII

SIN TRANSACTED REALLY UPON CHRIST

Tobias Crisp

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid {or, made to meet,} on him the iniquity of us all." {Is.53:6}

I entered upon these words, not far from hence, the last Lord's day; and because some desired further light in the truth contained in them, I thought it not amiss to communicate something more, that light may shine forth from them.

The whole chapter sets out Christ abundantly, with ravishing sweetness; in this text, and the verse before it, is contained the sum of the whole Gospel of Christ, the fountain of all the glad tidings published to the sons of men. Here the Holy Ghost tells us, how God disposes of our sins, then of the desert of them, and what the fruit of this disposing is; "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions." The fruit is: 1. Peace by his chastisement. 2. Healing by his stripes. The words of the text are so many propositions or doctrines; there are these particulars contained in them: 1. What it is the Lord laid on Christ, "iniquity." 2. How the Lord disposes of it, "he laid it on him." 3. Whose iniquities he lays on him, "the iniquities of us all," such as have gone astray. 4. When he laid them on him, the thing is past, "he hath laid," it is already done.

We have considered the first of these particulars, "that it is iniquity itself that the Lord laid upon Christ;" not barely punishment, leaving iniquity behind; but iniquity itself is laid upon him. I cannot stand to repeat all particularly; I will, therefore, fall at once upon the second thing; viz., how the Lord disposes of this iniquity, "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all upon him;" let that be the proposition, putting the emphasis upon the word 'laid.'

If ever there be joy, peace, and rest of spirit, or thou wilt be of good cheer, as having knowledge of thy sins being forgiven, it must be fetched out of this; "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all upon Christ." Men may suppose comfort and joy, and, in the strength of their fancy, peradventure, be at some kind of rest out of some other apprehensions; but there is no solid rest to any, but as it is founded on this, that iniquity is laid upon Christ. Satan knows this well enough, and therefore he raiseth a cloud of dust {as I may say} to obscure the glorious light of the sun of righteousness shining forth in this truth. There is such a stir to dismiss the plain genuine meaning of the Holy Ghost, that the truth is, persons scarce know where to find rest for the sole of their feet, in respect of peace, through the forgiveness of sins. And indeed, beloved, as the covenant of God is peculiar only to those that shall partake of the fulness of Christ; so none shall truly and thoroughly understand such truths as these, but those that are taught of God himself; which is one branch of the covenant, "they shall be taught of me."

That we may the better understand what evangelical sweetness is wrapped up in this truth, let us a little consider, what this phrase imports, according to the true meaning of the Holy Ghost. A great deal of shuffling there is about it, that the spirits of men can hardly receive it, or take it in plain English, "that iniquity is laid upon Christ;" by it, men generally conceive a kind of connivance of God; as if the Lord took notice, that this, and that, and the other person indeed bear transgression, but he forbears him, and will for the present purpose, that it is upon Christ; and so by laying its iniquity upon him, it must be no more, but God will be contented to esteem and think, iniquity is upon him; while indeed, and in truth, it remains where it was, upon the man himself that committed it.

But, beloved, under favour, I must be bold to tell you, that while men seek to vindicate God one way in this kind, they extremely abuse him in another; for if this be truth, that God only counts or

supposes iniquity upon Christ, whilst he knows well enough, it is yet upon this, and that person, and he himself bears it; mark what will follow; what will you call this esteem of God? Is it such an esteem and supposition that is righteous or false? Suppose a man speak of things, not according to the truth of the nature of the thing, but it is otherwise than he speaks of it; in this case, I would know whether such a speech be true or false; the truth of speech depends upon this, when that, and the thing whereof it is made, do agree together; if they agree, the speech is true; if it tends one way, and the thing itself another, it is false. Now then speeches are true or false, according to the truth of the thing spoken of; so are the thoughts and suppositions of the mind; for all these are but the work or speech of it; therefore if the mind think of things, and these be otherwise, is it a true or false thought? A true one it cannot be, because it is not consonant to the thing thought of; so there is a mistake; but further, suppose a man know certainly beforehand, a thing is otherwise than he speaks, or than he thinks it to be, what call you this? This must be more than simply or barely a falsehood; in common acceptation this is no better than a lie; a man knows that a thing is thus and thus, yet he saith it is otherwise. Suppose, I know a man is in such a place, and I will think him in another, what is this better than a lie? Now to come to the point in hand, "the Lord laid iniquity upon Christ;" what is that? He will suppose, think, or take it for granted, that iniquity is on Christ, but he knows it is on the persons themselves still; see how God must be charged by men that run into such a strain as this; at the best they charge him with mistakes; for if he knows that the sins of men remain still upon themselves, and yet will suppose they do not, but are on Christ, is this supposition according to the true being of the thing or no? Certainly, beloved, that all-wise, all-knowing, all-searching God, hath no other thoughts of things than as they are; as he himself either makes or disposes of them, he esteems and thinks of them, so consequently of sin. If he says, "he lays, or hath laid, iniquity upon Christ," and hath discharged the believer from all iniquity; certainly God supposes and esteems things to be thus, as he hath disposed of them.

Indeed, let us not make God so childish; for if he laid iniquity on Christ, he past this real act upon him, and the thing is thus really, as he disposes of it; and therefore, in brief, this laying iniquity upon him, is such a translation of sin from those whose iniquity he lays upon him, that by it he now becomes, or did become, when they were laid, as really and truly the person that had all these sins, as those men who did commit them really and truly had them themselves. It is true, as I said before, Christ never sinned in all his life; "he did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth;" but this hinders not, but that there may be on him an absolute transaction; so that by laying iniquity on him, he becomes the sole person in the behalf of all the elect, that truly hath iniquity upon him.

For the better clearing of this, give me leave to open a few expressions of scripture that speak to the same effect, and peradventure some will give better light than others. Observe, II Cor.5:21. Having spoken of being reconciled unto believers, he tells us that, "he {that is Christ} was made sin for us;" here is not only sin itself charged upon him, but it is expressed, how God charged it, "he was made sin;" and this word, 'made sin,' hath more in it to show the reality of sin being upon Christ, by way of transaction, than the word laid. If you read the marginal notes upon our text, you shall perceive how translators render it; the Lord, saith the margin, made all our sins to meet upon him; the text, as we read it, runs, "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Now what is it for a thing to be made? Is it but a mere imaginary supposition or fancy? Doth not the word 'make' constitute the reality of the being of such a thing that is made? If you will know, what it is to be made sin more fully, look into Romans 5:19. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." What is the meaning of that being made sinners? The whole drift {as you may plainly see} of the Apostle is to compare the restoration of persons by Christ, with the fall of them by Adam. It is true, men are made sinners two ways, they are made sinners fruitfully by Adam; there is not only an universal sin cast over all mankind, but there is a fruitfulness to commit it; but the Apostle's drift in that place is to show that the personal transgression of Adam in eating the forbidden fruit, became the sin of all the men of the world, even before they themselves did either good or evil; from whence David saith, in Psalm 51:5. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Now David, when he was conceived,

had not himself personally sinned, neither was sin fruitful in him, to do evil himself; and yet he, even then, was made sin by the disobedience of one; now, what is this? Is it merely to be supposed or imagined to have sin? Or is not there a reality of guilt, or of sin upon men by Adam's transgression? The apostle saith expressly, "by the disobedience of one, many were made sinners;" and so it appears, that we are actual, that is to say, real sinners, by that very sin of his; that is, separate from transgressions, in our own persons; if then, a making persons sinners constitute a thing really in being, and not merely in imagination, it must follow, that Christ being made sin, or sin being laid upon him, is a real act; God really passes over sin upon him, still keeping this fact, that Christ sinned not; so that in respect of this act, not one sin of the believer is Christ's.¹ But in respect of transgression, the conveyance of it or passing accounts from one head to another, there is a reality of making Christ to be sin. When one man becomes a debtor in another's room, legally and by consent; this surety that becomes the debtor, is not barely supposed to be so, but by undertaking it, and legally having it passed upon him, he is as really and truly the debtor, as he was that was the principal before; so that there is an absolute truth and reality of God's act of passing over and laying sins upon Christ. If a judge would think such a man to be a malefactor, when in his own conscience he knows he is not, and upon his thought that he is, will actually hang him, is there any justice in such an act? If God will but suppose Christ to have sin upon him, and knows that he hath it not, but others have it upon them; and upon this supposition will execute Christ, what will you call this? As I said before, there must of necessity be a present desert upon a person, before the judge can inflict anything upon him; a fault must be found upon a man, before he may be executed legally and justly; therefore the fault must be found really upon Christ himself, before there can be an act of God's justice in wounding him.

You have another phrase expressing the same thing, Isaiah 53:11,12. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death; and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Christ did bear the sins of many. Now what is it to bear a thing? Doth a man bear a thing merely in the way of supposition? Or where there is a bearing, is there not a real weight? This I am sure of, where the Holy Ghost speaks of men's "bearing their sin" he speaks of such a thing as shall lie heavy upon men. In Leviticus you have it often expressed, "and they shall bear their iniquities;" speaking of persons that should be rejected and cast off. What is this bearing, but that sin should be found upon men, having a weight which shall be able to crush, bow, and break them? "My soul {saith Christ} is heavy unto death;" and thus he spake before he suffered any real bodily pain. How came it to be heavy, if there were not some weight that he bore? If he did bear iniquity, and not the weight of it on him, how can his soul be heavy? Nothing is bowed down, except there be some real burden borne that should do it; so that there must therefore be sin really past upon Christ, or else he could never stoop and bow, and be so heavy loaded as he was.

There is one phrase more in John 1:29. By the way, give me leave to tell you, that whereas it is generally received, that John prepared the way of Christ, and therefore is called his fore-runner, because he went in a way of beating down and breaking in pieces; you shall find, I say, that his main business, which he is called the preparer of the way of the Lord, was, he pointed with his finger to Christ, that so people might now see him whom they expected. "Behold {saith he} the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world." I say, this was his main business, to point out Christ, that people might see him now to be come; and for this very cause, he is said to "prepare the way of the Lord." What is the taking away of sin? It is worth consideration, beloved; it cannot sink into the head of any reasonable person, though he be but merely natural, that a thing should be taken away, and yet be left behind; it is a flat contradiction; if a man be to receive money at such a place, and he takes

¹ {Note: This clearly shows the sense in which the Doctor is always to be understood; that the sins of believers become Christ's, not only in respect of the act, as done by him, but as debts become those who are surety for others; in which, as there is a real passing of debts over to them, so there is a real passing over of sins to Christ. Gill.}

it away with him, is it left in the place where it was, when he hath taken it away? The Lamb of God, Christ, takes away the sins of the world, and doth he leave them behind him? It is a contradiction. Look in Lev.16:21,22, where you have that most admirable type of all the types of Christ mentioned, and that is the type of the scape-goat; and there you will plainly perceive what it is for iniquity to be laid upon Christ, and how far forth it concerns the believer. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness; and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited, and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." There was a goat slain, and a live one sent into the wilderness; that is, Christ dying, and Christ living. It is true, our sins are laid upon Christ dying, that satisfied for them; but the discharge of our sins, or receiving the acquittance, is from Christ alive or risen. Now as this scape-goat must have the sins of the people laid upon the head of him, and, when laid, must go into the wilderness, and carry their sins with him; just so doth Christ with the sins of believers. God lays iniquities upon him, namely, by transferring them upon him, that he takes them away, and carries them into a land of forgetfulness, into the wilderness, a land not inhabited; that is, into a place that shall not be heard of any more; therefore, the Lord, in the closure of the new covenant, shuts it up thus, "your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more." How so? He hath carried them away into a land not inhabited; he hath taken them away, and, therefore, they are not left behind upon the person whose they were, till Christ took them away; though I say, still the person or a believer daily, hourly, every moment, renews several acts, which, in their own nature, are sins; they commit such things that are not according to the revealed word of God; yet, Christ being become the "surety of a better testament," still has taken off every transgression which arises; he died not for present and past sins only, but "for the sins of the whole world;" that is, for all the sins of all his elect people at once, both Gentiles as well as Jews even to the end of the world; he hath taken and carried them away.

There are many objections, I know, arising in the hearts of men, yea even of believers themselves, till they come to be more and more enlightened, against this reality of transacting sin upon Christ, by which the person of a believer is acquitted; some of them are gathered out of phrases of scripture; others are raised up from reason; some are maintained by common and natural sense. I shall endeavour {as clearly as possibly I may} to answer those of greatest moment, that people may be satisfied in the truth.

Against such reality of transacting sin upon Christ, there is one phrase of the apostle Paul, very much objected, and that is {imputing;} and hence, say some, God's laying of iniquity upon Christ, is nothing else but God's imputing sin to him. Now this word 'imputation' in the common understanding of people ordinarily, seems to carry something different in it from the real act of transferring sin from a believer unto Christ; it seems to signify only a supposition or connivance. Give me leave to open this word {'imputing'} to you; for I am confident it stumbles many a person, not understanding the true meaning of the Holy Ghost in it; and I shall endeavour to clear it to you out of scripture itself. First, that which I shall answer for the imputation of sin to Christ, is this; though I have searched the scripture as narrowly as possibly I may; yet, this I find, that throughout the whole there is not one passage of it that speaks of imputing our sins to Christ. In Romans, chapter 4, the word imputation; and that which is equivalent to it, accounting and reckoning, are seven times mentioned; and in chapter 5:13, it is mentioned again; but still where the Holy Ghost speaks of imputation, he speaks of sin not imputed, and of righteousness imputed to us; but not once of sin imputed unto Christ.² So that if we put this objection off as not being the phrase of scripture, it might be a full answer.

² {Note: Not that the Doctor was against the imputation of sin to Christ, or thought it an unscriptural doctrine; for it is the very thing, under different phrases, he is all along, in these discourses, contending for; and he makes use of it himself; but what he militates against is, as some people understood it, as if it was a thing imaginary, which was only supposed of Christ, and not real; which sense he sets aside, and is his view in producing the objections he does; and settles the true sense of it by reckoning and accounting, which illustrates the true nature of imputation,

But some will say, there is that which is equivalent to it; for if sin be not imputed unto us and righteousness is; as we partake of Christ's righteousness, so he partakes of our sin; we partake of his righteousness by imputation, therefore he partakes of our sin by imputation. I will not contend about words; we will take it for granted, that it is consonant to scripture, that our sins are imputed unto Christ; all the difficulty lies in the true understanding of the word imputation; how shall we find it? Look into Lev.17:3,4, that will give light unto it. "What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat, in the camp, or that killeth it out of the camp, and bringeth it not unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, to offer an offering unto the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD; blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people." Now, beloved, mark what the meaning of the word 'imputed' is; it is no more but this, as he is truly and really guilty of blood, so he shall really and truly go for a bloody man; imputation here, you see plainly, hath reference to the truth and reality of the thing; he hath shed blood, and therefore blood shall be imputed to him.

Again, look into I Sam.22:15, where you shall find Ahimelech pleading hard with Saul for his own life, and for the lives of his household. It seems Saul charged Ahimelech, that he had relieved David with victuals and arms against him; for which cause, Saul calls him forth to the end he might destroy him for it. Now mark how Ahimelech pleads for himself; "did I then begin to enquire of God for him? Be it far from me; let not the king impute anything unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father, for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more." What is the meaning of 'impute' here? First, Ahimelech acquits himself from being faulty in what Saul charged upon him; he did no such thing, he was accused of, hereupon, saith he, "let not the king impute any such thing to me;" as much as to say, let the king determine and conclude of things according as really and truly they are; and this is the meaning of the word there.

Again, look into Rom.5:13, and you shall see there again the word 'impute' is taken in the same sense; for the Apostle saith, "but sin is not imputed where there is no law." Now mark in chapter 4:15, "for where no law is, there is no transgression;" put these two together, the meaning must be this; God imputes no sin where he finds no law transgressed; that is, there is no sin in being where there is no law transgressed; and therefore, he so determines and concludes of the thing. God's determining of things according as indeed they are, is his imputing things evermore.

Look into Rom.4:3,4. There are two words that illustrate the nature of imputation, and they are these, accounting and reckoning. Now enquire and understand the real and common use of these words, to account and reckon. Suppose men are to pass an account, for that is the proper meaning of the word; to account, is to pass an account; and, upon the balance, there is so much money accounted to such a man; what is the meaning of it? Is it not that there is really so much money due to this man? And so, for the word reckoning, what is that? You know how ordinary it is for men to reckon together; for accounting and reckoning are all one. Men cast up their accounts, and upon the casting of them up, they find this and that due; that is, they reckon that such a man oweth so much; so that understanding the course of scripture, and the common use of the phrases of reckoning and accounting; you shall find that imputing is nothing but God's determination and conclusion that he passes upon things, as really and truly they are, without imagining things to be so and so, when indeed, and in truth, they are not so.

There is a second passage of scripture that is much objected against this reality of God's passing sin upon Christ. That is in Rom.4:17, and indeed, at first glance, it seems to carry some strength with it, that there is not a reality in the act of imputation, but that God is contented to account it so; the Lord "calleth those things which be not as though they were." Some may suppose that the Holy Ghost here imports to us, that it may well stand with God, though sins are not indeed upon Christ, yet to call them so, as if they were upon him. But, beloved, give me leave to give you the true scope of the Apostle in this place; and you shall plainly perceive, that this is broken sense, wholly

as he after observes; and in which sense he readily allows it, as not being opposite to a real act of God in transferring sin to Christ; which is the thing his heart was set upon to prove, and to beat into the minds of men. Gill.}

torn away from his true meaning in it. Mark it well, I pray; the Apostle, in the beginning of this chapter tells us of God's promise made to Abraham, recited Gen.17:5, "neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations." Now, because this promise was spoken before Abraham actually had children, and, when his body was dead in a manner, and so was not; hereupon he takes upon him to commend the faith of Abraham, that he should build upon the word of God, when there was so little likelihood of the thing; it was all one as if it were not at all; and he shows the ground whereupon he built with so much confidence, even the power of God, that makes things that are not, when he hath said the word, to be. So that the meaning of the place, is only this, though Abraham was not, that is, he was dead unto fruitfulness, yet the Lord having said, he would make him a "father of many nations," calls him as fruitful a person as he that was most so, though for the present he was not; so that, for the meaning of it, the utmost that can be made is this, that God, in respect of his power to bring to pass, when he saith the word, will call things as if they were present in being, when they are not, but in time shall be.

But what is this to the present purpose, if God did not really transfer sin to Christ, nor never meant to do it? For if he hath not done it already, he never will; I say, if he neither hath, nor will, how doth this place prove that he calls things that are not, as though they were? This is certain, beloved, though all things that ever shall be in the world, are most present to the Lord at once; for so they may be said to be, in respect of him, though, as to the things themselves, they yet are not; yet, in all the scripture, you shall never find the Lord expressing himself so; he never calls things thus and thus, when they never are, nor never shall be. If Christ has not already borne the sins of men himself, then certainly he never shall; for he is not now to do any more, to compass anything not compassed; and if neither heretofore sin hath been, nor hereafter shall be, laid upon him, how can God call that which was not, nor never shall be, as if it were?

There is, therefore, beloved, a certain transacting of sin upon Christ, so real, that, indeed, the believer, though an actor of transgression, is as absolutely and truly discharged of his sins, as if he himself had not committed them. As a debtor, when the surety hath taken the debt on him, and the debtor receives an acquittance, he is as free of the debt as if he had never run into it; so, I say, it is with believers, Christ being made "a Surety of a better testament;" and, thereby becoming really and truly the debtor instead of them; he so bears all the debt himself; that they are altogether released and discharged, as if they had never been in debt. Still, I say, this hinders not, but that there is committing of sin every day by the believer; but yet the virtue of Christ's Suretyship takes it off as soon as ever it is committed; nay, he hath a proviso, a stock in bank to satisfy for it before the commission of it.

Now, beloved, as there are many strong objections out of many passages of scripture; so, likewise, are there many strong ones, as many conceive from natural sense and reason; which, yet, being well weighed and considered, will vanish into smoke. I could willingly go on to answer these, but the time at present will not permit.