

# The American Crisis

By

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The crisis of every person's life is three-fold: (1) Alienation from God, because of sin; (2) The guilt and meaningless of life that follows; (3) The ultimate destiny: life or death. Failure to resolve the crisis produces fear, despair and disintegration, the evidence of which we see plentifully all around us.

The radical solution provided by God points to the seriousness of the situation. From the Edenic garden God promised a Savior who would crush the tempter. The death of Christ He prefigured by slaying animals to provide a covering for Adam and Eve who had lost their fellowship with God, and their deathless condition. It was God who provided the solution to their crisis.

God's revelation from that day forward was centered in the atonement for sin to be made by Christ. In giving the law He explained the meaning of animal sacrifice: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your lives: for it is the blood that makes atonement by reason of the life" (Lev. 17:11). Without the shedding of blood there is no atonement (Heb. 9:22), and without atonement there is no purification from sin (Lev. 16:30). Without purification from sin, man is doomed to die, for the Creator intended man to be sinless and holy that he might have fellowship with Him.

The Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed the full atonement to be made by Christ (Heb. 10:1, 10; Rom. 8:3-4). Those sacrifices offered by the priests formed the very core of law and life to the Israelites. God stated that He had no delight in the sacrifices, yet they were essential because of His just and holy nature. Sin is intolerable to God, and the penalty must be met. Yet the death of animals was no proper payment. **The life of an animal is no price for the life of a man in God's image. It took God incarnate in flesh, suffering and dying on the cross to meet the just penalty He imposed.** "Every priest indeed stands day-by-day ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God...for by one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:11-14).

Christ's death was not the mere act of a good man dying for his convictions; nor was it the death of a martyr. What he did was to die an atoning death, a death under God's sovereign decree of death for sin, to remove the guilt of death for sin, to remove the guilt of sin from all saints by suffering their penalty of death for them (II Cor. 5:14, 21). It was God Himself who provided the means of cleansing from sin. It is God who imputes our sins to Christ, and wipes them all away by Christ's death, and that only when we believe the truth about it and comply with God's terms upon which the cleansing is done. Once this is done, the believer is declared righteous by God's word, and is restored to holiness and fellowship with Him. No longer is he alienated from God. No longer is he under the burden of guilt, for God declares him clean. No longer is he under bondage to the fear of death (Heb. 2:15), for the death for sin has already been sustained by Christ,

and the believer has the promise of immortality—eternal life in the very likeness of Christ Jesus (I John 3:2).

**Not Perfect?** The great cloud of doubt that hangs over the heads of many rises from the fact that while God declares us righteous in Christ, we know that we still do not live totally righteous lives. Our performance never matches our profession. The Best Christian will continue to miss the mark. John writes that if we say we do not do so, we are liars (I John 1:8, 10). The fact is that while we are declared sinless by God, we are still not perfect in mind or body and we must live out our lives under the pressures, temptations and weaknesses of this mortal flesh. We are not given supernatural power either in wisdom or in the flesh to perform perfectly. We are to work at it. We are to mortify the flesh, put to death its evil deeds, put off the works of the old man (Eph. 4:22, 24) and grow in grace and knowledge of Christ (II Peter 3:18). God pays the bill for our sin. He wipes the slate clean, and keeps it clean as long as we stand fast in the faith, but it is up to us to work out our own salvation as far as keeping the commandments, and we will often fail.

Even so, while we cannot eliminate all traces of Adam's nature in our actions, God still says that if we are in Christ we are just! The test of faith is to believe it, to believe that we are indeed free from sin and guilt, not because we have attained perfection, but because God declares us righteous, on the basis that Christ atoned for our sins. To doubt that we are just (righteous) in His eyes is to doubt the power of Christ's death, the one thing that God has done in history, at a particular time and place, to make us free from sin and guilt and death.

The skeptic delights in pointing to the Christian's failures, observing that he must be a hypocrite since his claim to be Christian is not supported by a perfect life. Paul gives us the answer to such skeptics. **“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died, yea, rather, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us”** (Rom. 8:33–44). Even if we are not performing perfectly, as we wish and as we desire, the cleansing still stands! It is God who declares the believer righteous by the atoning death of Christ. His blood cleanses and continues to cleanse from all sin (I John 1:7–9).

**Two Obstacles.** Modern man does not take the issue of atonement seriously because he understands neither the nature of sin nor the nature of God. He has been conditioned to a democratic philosophy: the majority is right. Everyone sins in some way, therefore it must be normal and right. Marijuana must be legalized, since so many smoke it. Students no longer are ashamed of being caught cheating, because “everybody does it.” It ceases to be sin. Where young women once blushed at being called sexy, they now blush at being accused of being virgins. Sin has become the accepted way of life. Where men grow up under the teaching that they evolved and arrived full-grown, independent of God, there is no consciousness of a God to account to. Modern man despises whatever hinders his pleasure and the thing that is “bad” is whatever is undesirable. He is not sinning if he is enjoying what he is doing or if it is profitable or advantageous to his goals.

He sees no need for atonement. If his sin gets him into trouble in some way, he is sorry and may seek God to get him out of the bad situation. This is not seeking atonement

nor the purpose of atonement. Even if he has an “experience” and talks of his conversion he is still under sin’s penalty until he is made righteous through faith and obedience to the gospel, the only means the Creator has given for forgiveness. Sin is against God. It is the breaking of God’s law. It matters not whether we suffer any loss from it or gain by it, it is sin and alienates us from God. Nothing we can do will erase it until the day of judgment when the sinner is punished by death. Only the restitution made by Christ, the total penalty he endured by His death, can atone for our sin and make us right with God.

Until man sees the enormity of sin, what it is and what its final consequences are, he cannot see that the gospel is the central issue in his life and in the nation and in history.

The second obstacle to faith in the atonement is man’s views of God. Not only does man fail to see himself the sinner he is, but he fails to see Holy God is. God is love, the Bible tells us. The modern concept of love is so perverted that God is thought to govern by sentiment. Young people become sentimental with each other and think this is love, so they get married, only to find that they cannot stand the sight of each other as soon as the sentimentality wanes and the emotions cool. But God is supposed to have this sentimental feeling and to be perpetually in love with us, no matter what we do. People who never give a thought to God and His commands are insulted when it is suggested that they are alien to him and need reconciliation. To suggest that He would punish them with everlasting destruction is to insult **their** God. He loves everybody and will not execute a sinner. To such minds God is neither just nor holy, but a mere benign being of great power who uses that power for sentimental ends. This puts the relationship between man and God on a footing of subjectivism and eliminates the meaning of atonement.

With both sin and a Holy God out of the picture, what need is there for the good news of atonement? No longer is it the center of preaching and the object of evangelism. Instead men are told to “invite Jesus” into their lives and He will give them excitement and satisfy their needs. The church no more identifies sin and therefore no longer is seen as a light exposing sin and guiding men to the means of atonement. As one man said, “The church is no longer a voice crying in the wilderness: IT IS THE WILDERNESS.”

One of the greatest needs in the pulpits is the proclamation of the person of God, His nature and attributes: His sovereignty, His holiness, His goodness, His absolute justice, His mercy and His wrath. Anyone who wants a challenging and rewarding study can take a good concordance or topical Bible and simply study God under these headings, and he will receive a great blessing. Also he will have a greater awareness of sin and the necessity of atonement.

By Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, he solved the basic problem of humanity, He restored every believer to fellowship with God, by removing the barrier of sin. He took away the guilt and meaninglessness of life and made it possible for every believer to walk in the narrow way of righteousness with a clear conscience. He removed the fear of death and gave every believer the promise of eternal life.

In this life we still have a challenge, a struggle against sin (Heb. 12:4) and a mission to uphold the truth in the face of the world’s lies (I John 4:1–6). But in the resurrection we will be raised without the weakness of the mortal flesh and will live in a world that is free from the curse of sin (II Peter 3:13) and thus attain the personal righteousness which is our now by faith in the atonement given us by Christ’s sacrifice.

What is the issue that confronts our nation today? Crime, violence, law-breaking, political tyranny, disintegration of homes, national bankruptcy—all these are but the results of sin and alienation from God. From the president to the house-maid, the crisis is the same. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). The only direction from this crisis is repentance toward God.

Freedom begins with being free from sin, guilt and the fear of death, and only upon this basis can any other freedom—social, political and economic—be established. The only thing that will save America is that which saves the individual: the Gospel of the atonement for sin made once for all time by Jesus the Christ of God.

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