

**THE GOSPEL
POINTING TO THE
PERSON OF CHRIST**



Rev. Andrew A. Bonar

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PERSON OF CHRIST**

By Andrew A. Bonar

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Cover photo: a Scottish fishing scene.

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Publisher's Note: The Gospel Standard Trust issues this book with the hope that it might be spiritually profitable. Although we only issue books we feel set forth a Scriptural standard, there will be differences in opinion and interpretation, and the most gracious of men still have to say, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.' We trust our readers will prayerfully 'prove all things' and 'hold fast that which is good,' whilst bearing in meekness with any imperfections.

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

The name of Andrew A. Bonar (1810-1892) is generally remembered today on account of his biography of Robert Murray M'Cheyne. He was a minister in the Free Church of Scotland, firstly at Collace in Perthshire and then at Finnieston in Glasgow. While not as prolific an author as his brother, Horatius Bonar, the books he did write have proved particularly precious to the Lord's people. These include his *Commentary on Leviticus*, in which Bonar brings forth the glories of the Gospel in opening the meanings of the Old Testament worship; and *Christ and his Church in the Book of Psalms*.

The book in your hand is one of Bonar's unjustly forgotten writings. Perhaps because of its size it has been disdained, or more easily lost. Today, original copies are rare and command a high price on the second-hand market. But the content of this book is of preeminent importance.

Too many today look to Jesus just for the benefits of salvation, rather than looking to him for *himself*. In life, relationships (in marriage; between parent and child; or manager and worker) will be fragile, and easily broken or dysfunctional, if they are based solely on the value of

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what somebody does for you or gives to you. The secret of enduring marriages, through better and worse, riches and poverty, sickness and health, is *love to one another*. Then when our ability to support, provide or give to our spouse is taken from us, our love will still remain the same, because the *person* we love will still be the same.

For similar reasons, the religion of many today is dysfunctional, because we rest on what we give and get in our relationship to Christ, rather than on the *Person* of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, when our religion fails (our love is cold, our obedience faltering, our sins break out afresh, and other lords have rule over us) we conclude there is no hope for us. But if our hope was fixed in Christ, instead of on our own works and experience, we would find *Jesus has not changed*, his love knows no diminishment, our anchor remains strong. The same is true when we seek unduly the benefits he gives us (forgiveness through his blood, his righteousness, the Spirit of Adoption) rather than worshipping the blessed hand which gives them. This disposition appears in so many subtle ways – to name one extreme example: when we are more taken up with what heaven will be like and whether we will know other people there, rather than

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looking forward to seeing the Lamb in the midst of the throne! How different a spirit to that found in Samuel Rutherford, as paraphrased:

The Bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown he giveth
But on his pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Immanuel's land.

Those who are brought and taught to rest alone upon Christ prove the safety and sweetness of a Christ centred religion. It was this religion which Bonar so earnestly sought for his readers, and his whole aim in this little book is to teach you of the existence of such religion and encourage you to covet the best gifts.

We would say: this is a book which gets better as it goes on. Why? Because in the first half Bonar rightly labours the points we have made briefly above. It can all appear rather dry. The reader might even say, 'I know this – it is

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obvious,’ and be inclined to put the book down. But come to the second half where Bonar introduces the ‘practical’ part – he begins to open the glories and the perfections of the Person of Christ – and then all of a sudden, the reader is confronted with the glorious reality of the point Bonar has been making: *Jesus is precious himself!* He is, and can be, and should be, followed, worshipped and loved for who he is and not for what he gives or does for his people. So persevere, and may you find the same soul delights in the second half as so many have before.

Some may be surprised at us publishing writings by Andrew Bonar. To them we would make clear that we cannot and do not support all the positions Bonar took in his ministry, nor recommend all his writings. We venture to publish this little book simply because we are unaware of any other publication which makes the vital point Bonar does in such a clear and brief manner.

We have corrected Scriptural references and updated spelling and grammar in places. The occasional obsolete

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word has been changed for one with identical meaning.¹ We have added references (where locatable) to all the material Bonar cites within the book. Otherwise, the book appears as Bonar published it with his final amendments. Editorial footnotes are clearly marked. All other footnotes are Bonar's own.

Matthew J. Hyde

¹ In one place we have changed a word for theological reasons. While we respect, but disagree with, Bonar's views on the 'free offer' of the gospel, we were unhappy with him using the word offer in relation to the text Revelation 2:26-28, which clearly states: 'will I give.' A gift and an offer are not synonymous – one can be refused, the other cannot. We have opted for the Scriptural terminology.

PREFACE

The object of the book is to draw more attention to the great subject of connecting at all times the Person of Christ with his work. This is a point which the experience of the most solid believers has testified to as of vast importance. Augustus Toplady quotes the following case from the diary of one who afterwards preached Christ, Mr Thomas Cole. Listen to his interesting statement.

I was convinced I could be saved no other way than by grace, if I could but find grace enough. But at that time I saw more in my own sin than in God's mercy. But this put me on a further inquiry after the grace of God, because my life lay upon it: and then I was brought to the gospel. When, however, I came to the gospel, I met with the law in it; that is, I was for turning the gospel into law. I began to settle myself upon gospel-duties, such as repentance, humiliation, believing, praying; and (I know not how) I forgot the promise of grace, which first brought me to the gospel. Soon I found I could neither believe nor pray as the gospel required. While I was in this plunge, it pleased the Lord to direct me to study the Person of Christ, whom I looked on as the great undertaker in the work of man's salvation! And truly here

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I may say, as Paul did, 'It pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me.' God overcame my heart with this. I saw so much mercy in his mercy, so much love in his love, so much grace in his grace, that I knew not what to liken it to. And here my heart broke, I knew not how! Before this faith came, I knew not how to secure myself against past, present, and future sins: but there was that largeness of grace, that all sufficiency of mercy, that infinity of righteousness, discovered to me in Christ, that I found sufficient for all the days of my life.

Andrew A. Bonar,
Glasgow,
June 1858

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE FACT THAT THE PERSON OF CHRIST IS THE ESSENCE OF THE GLAD TIDINGS

From the beginning, the gospel has come to the awakened sinner with the same consciousness of important news to tell, as that messenger who ran to David, after the battle of Mahanaim (see 2 Samuel 18), exclaiming, ‘All is well!’ But even as the burden of that message brought by Ahimaaz was simply victory, without any narrative of details, so was the Old Testament proclamation of the good news to our earth. There was still need of a Cushite to give details; and Cushite did come upon the heels of Ahimaaz, telling that the essence of the victory lay in the fact of the leader of the host being himself slain. It is thus the New Testament has overtaken the Old, proclaiming ‘Tidings, O earth! Tidings! It is the Son of God who has died, satisfying the law of his Father, and establishing his throne.’

In the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:32), Paul announced to the intently listening audience, ‘We declare unto you glad tidings!’ and forthwith added, that the promise made to the fathers was now fulfilled in *Jesus*

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risen. It was as if he had said, ‘The voice from the excellent glory cries, Hear the beloved Son! and speaks of nothing but what he is, has, and has done.’ That vessel which has endured all the storms of wrath, that ark which has borne unmoved the shock of waterfalls from the opened windows of heaven, and depths breaking up below, contains everything fitted to meet the sinner’s need; and in proportion as the Holy Ghost reveals this Person to the awakened sinner, there will come to light a store of all things suited to the cravings of an immortal soul.

When the sinner has got any clear discovery of this glorious Person, he is a saved man; for so we find written in Galatians 1:13, 15, 16, ‘Ye have heard of my conversation in time past ... But ... it pleased God ... to reveal his Son in me.’ Matthew 16:16: ‘Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.’

Resting on this Person for salvation is called, ‘Faith in Jesus Christ’ (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 86).

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In this faith, there is an intellectual act, namely the apprehending of the meaning of what is stated concerning Jesus. But this apprehension of the meaning of what is stated, or testified, concerning Jesus, is but the avenue that leads on to the magnificent mansion. It leads the soul *to the Person* of whom these things are declared. It never is the belief of bare propositions that saves the soul; for these have to do only with the understanding. Propositions, however weighty, must guide us onward to the Person who is the essence of the testimony; and they are made use of for this end by the same Holy Spirit who enlightens our once carnal understanding to see the real truth.² The belief of the testimony, or record, concerning

² ‘Though faith be radically in the understanding, yet it operates on the will which embraces the object’—(James Fisher (1765) *The Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Explained, by way of Question and Answer* – see answer to question 70, in explanation of question 86).

‘Faith is begun in the head, but not perfected till it comes into the heart’—(John Rogers of Dedham (1638) *The Doctrine of Faith*. London. p. 23).

‘Faith is not so much a *disposition of the mind toward the truth*, as a *disposition of the heart toward Christ*, produced by means of the truth’—(James Sievewright (1825) *Thoughts on Sanctification*. William Oliphant: Edinburgh. p. 80).

‘The soul in believing closes with the Person of Christ. He is the principal object, though not the immediate object of faith’—(James Fraser of Brae (1738) *Memoirs*. Edinburgh. p. 115).

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the Son of God, our Saviour, is the porch of the building, through which we pass into the audience-chamber and meet the living inhabitant, full of light, and life, and love.

There is a twofold remedy required to meet the urgent need of a fallen soul.

1st. The soul must feel entirely delivered from that guilt which has compelled the Holy God to withdraw. The sinner's soul is by nature laden with guilt, the guilt of original and actual sin; and until this guilt is altogether taken away, there can be no freedom of access to God. But remove this barrier, and then the Holy God may meet the sinner, and the sinner may run to the open arms of the Holy God. This is the bringing of the *conscience* to solid rest.

2nd. The soul has feelings, emotions, affections, which constitute what we call in common language *the heart* of the man. The *heart*, then, must be brought to its rest, as well as the conscience; and it will be brought to rest, if you can find for it an object vast enough, rich enough, and so accommodated to its frame as to give ample scope for the exercise of all its powers, and the play of all its feelings.

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Now both these ends are answered when the soul discovers *the Person of the God-man*. There it is that the twofold remedy is found. For now, the conscience, enabled by the Holy Spirit to discern and examine the treasures stored up in the God-man-Mediator, finds all the materials needful to its pacification and rest, inasmuch as his obedience to the law and satisfaction rendered for dishonour done to it, are efficacious beyond measure. And next, when enabled by the same Spirit of Truth to explore the wealth of sympathy, and tenderness, and brotherly feeling, wherewith the God-man is equipped, and which is given forth from the side of his humanity, the man finds therein such an object as his heart craved, an object on which his heart can repose.

It is now that he tastes 'The Bread of Life.' It is only now that he knows the meaning of making the Saviour his meat and drink (John 6:52); for it is now that he has found out the entire remedy for his case in the person of a Mediator, who unites the human nature with the Divine, and uses both in dealing with man. Finding flesh and blood (and of course all that is peculiar to a frame wherein flesh and blood are ingredients,) in a Saviour, whose doing, dying, and rising again, brought in

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everlasting righteousness, the man can say, ‘Every part of my nature has been thought upon, and provision made for all my feelings and faculties, as well as conscience; this is indeed meat and drink to me! His flesh is meat indeed! His blood is drink indeed!’

Our purpose, then, is to enter into details whereby we may show that the Person of Christ is, and has always been, the essence of the gospel. The glad tidings of great joy all cluster round that Person; invitations and calls draw us to him; and warrants for believing the Gospel are in reality testimonies, the drift of which is mainly this—to fix our eye upon that Person’s self, and assure us of the capabilities of his heart and arm.

And no that wonder it should be so; for he is GOD, manifest in the flesh. To see him, is to see GOD in the attitude of redemption. To see him is to see the GOD of holy love putting himself in a position wherein he might be able, justly and honourably, to save sinners. To see him is to see *Godhead* finding a way of coming to sinners with open arms, and yet remaining as holy, and just, and true, as from all eternity.

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To show that this is the essence of the Gospel may be important alike to saints who already fear the Lord, and to sinners who are only groping for him. Both are thus led directly to confront God,—‘God ... manifest in the flesh’ (1 Timothy 3:16), ‘in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2:3). The saint finds that here he floats upon an ocean of grace, and that the more constantly he abides here, the more he is blessed. The seeking sinner finds that his perplexities are cleared away, when he is dealing, not with abstract truths, nor with cold statements, but with a Person, and that Person full of grace and truth.

‘Come *now*,’ (meaning: come, I pray you; come I beseech you,) ‘*let us reason together, saith the LORD*’ (Isaiah 1:18). Here are two parties before us—not one party dealing with the words and declarations of another, but two parties confronting each other. It is a meeting of spirit with spirit—the spirit of man, with God, who is Spirit. It is the living man coming to hear the living God tell his heart and ways.

Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress*, represents Christian, when relieved of his burden at the cross, singing with joy,

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Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be
THE MAN that there was put to shame for me.³

And in his *Instruction for the Ignorant*, the following dialogue occurs.

Question. If such a poor sinner as I am would be saved from the wrath to come, how must I believe?

Answer. Thy first question should be, on whom must I believe? (John 9:35, 36) ‘Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ ‘Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?’

Question. On *whom* then must I believe?

Answer. On the Lord Jesus Christ.

Question. Who is Jesus Christ, that I might believe on him?

Answer. He is the only-begotten Son of God.

Question. Why must I believe on *him*?

Answer. Because he is the Saviour of the world.⁴

Question. How is he the Saviour of the world?

³ Editor: Offor, G (1855) *The Works of John Bunyan*. Blackie and Son: Glasgow. Vol 3, p. 103.

⁴ Editor: As in John 3:17.

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Answer. By the Father's designation and sending; for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

Question. How did he come into the world?

Answer. In man's flesh—in which flesh he fulfilled the law, died for our sins, conquered the devil and death, and obtained eternal redemption for us.

Question. But is there no other way to be saved but by believing in Jesus Christ?

Answer. There is no other name, given under heaven, among men, whereby we must be saved. And therefore he that believeth not shall be damned. 'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). 'But he that believeth not shall be damned' (Mark 16:16). 'He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him' (John 3:18, 36).

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Question. What is believing on Jesus Christ?

Answer. It is the *receiving of him, with what is in him*, as the gift of God to thee a sinner. ‘To as many as received him, even to them that believe on his name, he gave power to become sons of God’ (John 1:12).

Question. What is in Jesus Christ to encourage me to receive him?

Answer. Infinite righteousness to justify thee, and the Spirit without measure to sanctify thee.

Question. Is this made mine if I receive Christ?

Answer. Yes, if you receive him as God offereth⁵ him to thee.

⁵ Editor: Modern usage of the term ‘offer’ is quite different from that in Bunyan’s day. Edward Phillips in his dictionary, *The New World of English Words* (1658), gives the definition as ‘present’. Similarly, Samuel Johnson in his *A Dictionary of the English Language* (First Folio, 1755) gives the definition: ‘To present to any one; to exhibit any thing so as that it may be taken or received.’ We believe Bunyan refers to nothing more than the faithful declaration – preaching – of the Gospel to all (Matthew 28:19). NB. The word ‘offer’ appears just 16 times in the New Testament, and never once in relation to the Gospel or to preaching. Rather the Gospel is always spoken of as being declared or preached, and none of the original Greek words can appropriate the modern usage of the word ‘offer’.

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Question. How doth God offer him to me?

Answer. Even as a rich man freely offereth an alms to a beggar—and so must thou receive him. ‘My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven; for the bread of God is he that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’ (John 6:32-35).⁶

⁶ Editor: Offor, G (1855) *The Works of John Bunyan*. Blackie and Son: Glasgow. Vol 2, p. 683.