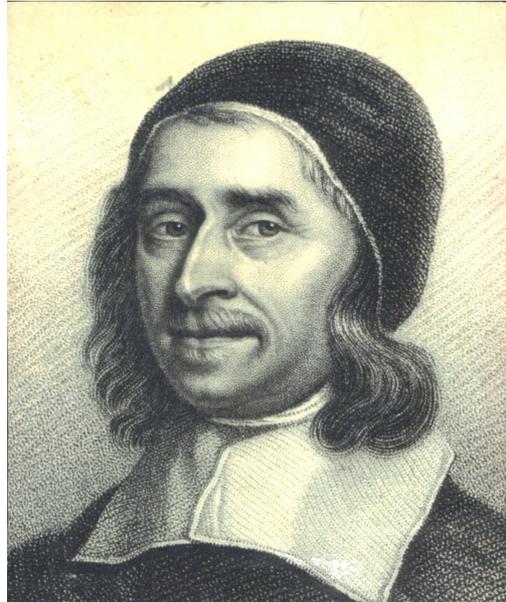


FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE? *BAXTER'S BIBLICAL BALANCE*

A RICHARD BAXTER QUATERCENTENARY PUBLICATION



Richard Baxter

(1615-91)

More widely read than Shakespeare in his day, Richard Baxter is one of England's greatest Christian preachers. His extraordinary seventeenth-century ministry at Kidderminster, Worcestershire is celebrated by an appropriate local statue. A more significant monument, Baxter's nationwide influence was diffused by such still-gripping 'page turners' as *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* and *Call to the Unconverted*. His lovely hymn 'Ye holy angels bright' is still enjoyed by modern worshippers. Neither must we ignore his colourful and dramatic life as recorded in his autobiography with its exotic Latin title *Reliquiae Baxterianae*. Baxter also made a mark on English history by his courageous stand before the infamous Judge Jeffreys in 1685.

Probably the greatest-ever British theologian, Richard Baxter is certainly the greatest of all the Puritans—the giant among giants! As a saintly, energetic, dedicated, brilliant and large-hearted servant of Christ, he is probably the most effective pastor-evangelist this country has ever known. Certainly, what C. H. Spurgeon was to the 19th, and George Whitefield (together with the Wesley brothers) was to the 18th, Baxter was to 17th century England. A. B. Grosart wrote that Baxter is said 'to have drawn more hearts to the great bleeding heart than any other Englishman of his age'.

Furthermore, his pen productions proved just as famous as his pulpit ministry at Kidderminster. Indeed, Baxter's writings are still being published 300 years on. It is said that he wrote more than any other English author *ever*. While all Thomas

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Goodwin's works would fill 20 volumes, and John Owen's 28 volumes, Baxter's would need 60 volumes! His style remains surprisingly lucid and lively when most of his contemporaries are obviously dated. Baxter's books still retain their power to inform, arouse and edify the modern reader.

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**FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?
BAXTER'S BIBLICAL BALANCE**

*The Extent of the Atonement and Gospel preaching in
the writings of Richard Baxter*

Selections presented
by
Dr Alan C. Clifford

According to the 'Limited Atonement' teaching of Theodore Beza, John Owen and others, Christ died for the elect ALONE. According to the 'Universal Atonement' teaching of Jakob Arminius, John Wesley and others, Christ died for ALL (yet salvation is uncertain for anyone). Richard Baxter - agreeing with Augustine, Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer and John Calvin et al, and urging an avoidance of extremist exegesis - maintained that the Bible demands a balanced view of 'generality' and 'particularity', as follows:

I

Richard Baxter's basic view of the Gospel to be preached universally (see Mark 16:15):

'For God, who is Love itself, so far loved lapsed and lost mankind, as that he gave his only begotten Son to be incarnate, and to be their Redeemer, by his meritorious Life, and Death, and Resurrection, and to make them this promise, covenant and offer, that whoever truly believeth in him, should have his sin forgiven; and should not perish, but have everlasting blessed life' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on John 3:16).

II

His refusal to 'explain away' the 'universal' texts of the Bible:

'When God saith so expressly that Christ died for all [2 Cor. 5: 14-15], and tasted death for every man [Heb. 2: 9], and is the ransom for all [1 Tim. 2: 6], and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world [1 Jn. 2: 2], it beseems every Christian rather to explain in what sense Christ died for all, than flatly to deny it' (*The Universal Redemption of Mankind* (1694), p.286).

III

His explanation of the four texts cited above:

(1) 'For we have cause to judge, that they are great things, which our Redemption intimateth, even that Christ, who died for all, found all men dead in Sin and Misery; and that he therefore redeemed them by his Death, that they who are recovered by him should not hereafter live to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

(2) '[Christ's] death was suffered in the common nature of Man, and the sins of all men had a causal hand in it, and it was by God's Grace the purchasing cause of the conditional Covenant of Grace, and of all the good that men receive, so he died to bring Man to Glory with himself' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on Hebrews 2:9).

(3) 'For it must move us to pray for all, in compliance with this Will of God, that would have all Men saved; because there is One God who is good to all, and One Mediator between God and Mankind, who took on him the Common Nature of all men, and gave himself a Ransom for all...' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

(4) 'For he is the Propitiation for our sins by virtue of his Sacrifice, now interceding for us in heaven: And he is a propitiation sufficient for the sins of the whole World (so far as that none of them shall be damned for want of a sufficient Sacrifice, but only for want of accepting his Grace) and actually effecting the Pardon of all in the world, who believingly trust and accept him and his Grace' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on 1 John 2:1-2).

IV

His view of the Atonement-based provision of the universal Gospel offer:

[We see] the wonderful love and mercy that God hath manifested in giving his Son to be the Redeemer of the world, and which the Son hath manifested in redeeming them by his blood; for all his full preparation by being a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all; for all his personal excellencies, and that full and glorious salvation that he hath procured; and for all his free offers of these, and frequent and earnest invitation of sinners...[He] declareth his person and nature, and the great things that he hath done and suffered for man; his redeeming him from the wrath of God by his blood, and procuring a grant of salvation with himself. Furthermore, the same gospel maketh an offer of Christ to sinners, that if they will accept him on his easy and reasonable terms, he will be their Saviour, the Physician of their souls, their Husband, and their Head' (*Making Light of Christ and Salvation* (1656), pp. 4-5, emphasis mine).

V

His distinction between the 'general' and 'special' aspects of the atonement in relation to predestination:

[God's people] are a small part of lost mankind, whom God hath from eternity predestined to [everlasting] rest, for the glory of his mercy, and given to his Son, to be by him in a special manner redeemed, and fully recovered from their lost estate, and advanced to this higher glory; all which Christ doth, in due time, accomplish accordingly by himself for them, and by his Spirit upon them' (*The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1658), p. 125, emphasis mine).

...Christ is, in some sense, a ransom for all, yet not in that special manner as for his people. He hath brought others under the Conditional Gospel-Covenant; but them under the absolute. He hath, according to the tenor of his covenant, procured salvation for all, if they will believe; but he hath procured for his chosen even this condition of believing (*The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1658), p. 126, emphasis mine).

'Christ's blood hath purchased the Church in a fuller sense than he is said to die for all' (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on Acts 20:28, emphasis mine).

‘Husbands, imitate Christ, in loving your wives, as Christ did his Church, for which (in a special sense) he gave himself by death,...’ (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Comment on Ephesians 5:25, emphasis mine).

VI

His view of God’s provision and man’s responsibility:

‘Whoever is damned, it is not because no ransom was made for him, or because it was not sufficient for him...God hath made an Universal Act of Grace or Oblivion, giving pardon of all sin, and right to life in Christ, to all men, without exception, on condition of believing acceptance, and hath commissioned his Ministers to offer this gift to all men, to the utmost of their power, and entreat them to accept it;... Few Christians have the face to affirm, that this universal Conditional Pardon and Gift (or Law of Grace) is no fruit of the Death of Christ’ (*A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (1685), Note on 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

VII

Affirming the biblical teaching on predestination and election, Baxter makes plain that evangelistic preaching is to be motivated not by God’s secret eternal decrees and absolute purposes but His revealed conditional purposes, desires and promises (see Deuteronomy 29:29):

‘It is further proved by the sufferings of his Son, that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Would he have ransomed them from death at so dear a rate? Would he have astonished angels and men by his condescension; would God have dwelt in flesh, and have come in the form of a servant, and have assumed humanity into one person with the Godhead? Would Christ have lived a life of suffering, and died a cursed death for sinners, if he had rather taken pleasure in their death?’

‘Suppose you saw him but so busy in preaching and healing of them, as you find him in Mark 3:21, or so long in fasting, as in Matt. 4, or all night in prayer, as in Luke 6: 12, or praying with the drops of blood trickling from him instead of sweat, as Luke 22: 44, or suffering a cursed death upon the cross, and pouring out his soul as a sacrifice

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for our sins, - would you have thought these the signs of one that delights in the death of the wicked?’

‘Think not to extenuate it by saying, that it was only for his elect. For it was thy sin, and the sin of all the world, that lay upon our redeemer; and his sacrifice and satisfaction is sufficient for all, and the fruits of it are offered to one as well as to another; but it is true, that it was never the intent of his mind, to pardon and save any that would not by faith and repentance be converted.’

‘If you had seen him weeping and bemoaning the state of disobedient impenitent people, Luke 19: 41, 42, or complaining of their stubbornness, as Matt. 23: 37, ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!’ Or if you had seen and heard him on the cross, praying for his persecutors, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ [Luke 23: 34]; would you have suspected that he had delighted in the death of the wicked, even of those that perish by their wilful unbelief?’

‘When God hath so loved (not only loved, but so loved) the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him (by an effectual faith) should not perish, but have everlasting life’, [John 3: 16], I think he hath hereby proved, against the malice of men and angels, that he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but had rather that they would turn and live’ (*A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), pp. 98-100 (paragraphing and emphasis mine).

BAXTER’S PASTORAL HEART

The persons for whom ‘eternal rest’ is designed—the ‘people of God’—are ‘the chosen of God from eternity’ (John 17:2). That they are but a small part of mankind is too apparent in scripture and experience. They are the ‘little flock’, to whom ‘it is their Father’s good pleasure to give the kingdom’ (Luke 12:32). Fewer they are than the world imagines; yet not so few as some drooping spirits think, who are suspicious that God is unwilling to be their God, when they know themselves willing to be His people.

The Saints Everlasting Rest (ed. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1833), p. 68.

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