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THE ATONEMENT

I

“ OF THE ONE OBLATION OF CHRIST FINISHED UPON THE CROSS ”

There seems abundant reason to believe that the English Reformers believed that the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ was *completed upon the Cross*. The title of the thirty-first of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion is, “ Of the one oblation of Christ *finished upon the Cross* ”, and the Article itself speaks of “ the offering of Christ once made ” and as “ that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction ” for sins, and proceeds to say, “ There is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone ”. This Article, therefore, clearly teaches that, in the view of the English Reformers, the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ was completed on the Cross.

Other expressions in the Articles seem to point in the same direction. In Article II we read of Christ that He “ truly suffered, was crucified, dead and buried, to reconcile His Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for all actual sins of men ”. These words suggest that Christ secured the reconciliation of His people by His death, and not by anything subsequent to His resurrection.

Again, in what is called “ the consecration prayer ” in the Communion Service, the Reformers say, “ Who of Thy tender mercy didst give Thine only Son Jesus Christ *to suffer death upon the Cross* for our redemption ; Who made there (i.e. upon the Cross), by His one oblation of Himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction ” for the sins of men. Upon the Cross, we are again taught, Christ made full satisfaction for sin. Not subsequently, but on the Cross, He made “ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction ”.

The Homilies teach the same doctrine. The Second Homily concerning *The Death and Passion of Our Saviour Christ*, says, “ Christ, by *His one oblation and once offering of Himself upon the Cross*, hath taken away our sins, and hath restored us again into God’s favour, so fully and perfectly that no other

sacrifice for sin shall hereafter be requisite or needful in all the world ”.

The second part of *The Homily of Repentance* says, “ We ought to acknowledge none other priest for deliverance from our sins but our Saviour Jesus Christ ; Who, being our sovereign Bishop, doth with *the sacrifice of His body and blood, offered once for ever upon the altar of the Cross*, most effectually cleanse the spiritual leprosy, and wash away the sins, of all those that with true confession of the same do flee unto Him ”.

His body and blood were regarded as “ offered once for ever upon the altar of the Cross ”, not at some time following upon His resurrection.

The doctrine of the *Westminster Confession* and of the *Larger Catechism* is in harmony with that of the English Reformers on this point.

The Confession of Faith (Chapter XI, 5) says, “ Christ, by His obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to His Father’s justice in their behalf ”.

It is here taught that full satisfaction was made “ *by His obedience and death* ”. If so He completed the atonement when He died on the Cross. Nothing more remained to be done. No subsequent act after His resurrection was needed, so that His atoning work might be completed. *The Larger Catechism* (question 71) says, “ Christ, *by His obedience and death*, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice in behalf of them that are justified ”.

II

ANOTHER VIEW

It has been held, however, that when our risen Lord said to Mary Magdalene, “ Touch Me not ; for I am not yet ascended to My Father ” (John xx. 17), He in effect meant, “ Hold Me not here, for My work as your Saviour *is not yet complete*. I must ascend immediately and through My own blood once for all before the mercy seat of heaven to make complete and perfect atonement for you.”

This view suggests (1) that our Lord did not complete the atonement on the Cross, but after His resurrection ; (2) that in

order to complete His atoning work He specially ascended into heaven on the day of His resurrection, and there through His own blood before the mercy seat made complete and perfect atonement for sinners.

This view is held to be necessary in order that Christ might fulfil the type of the high priest, on the day of atonement, entering the most holy place of the tabernacle, and sprinkling the blood of the sin-offering on and before the mercy seat seven times. If this view be correct, our Lord made two ascensions into heaven, one on the day of His resurrection and another, His formal and visible ascension, forty days after. Many interpretations have been given as to why our Lord forbade Mary to touch Him, and then not very long after allowed other women to hold Him by the feet (Matthew xxviii. 9).

It has been suggested that all our Lord meant by His words to Mary Magdalene was that as forty days would elapse before His formal ascension, she would have other opportunities of showing the depth of her feelings, but that just then He wished her to hasten at once with a message to His brethren. Whether that be so or not, the ancient Creeds of the Church Universal, apparently following the clear teaching of Scripture, speak of only one ascension of our Lord into heaven. The view that He ascended specially on the day of His resurrection seems, to say the least of it, to be lacking in clear Scriptural proof.

III

THE TEACHING OF THE TYPE

How, then, did Christ fulfil the typical acts of the high priest on the day of atonement? First, it needs to be remembered that the fulfilment of the type in all its details should not be pressed.

There are many *contrasts* as well as *resemblances* between the type and the antitype. Some of these contrasts may be noted.

(1) Aaron offered in connection with an *earthly* tabernacle, Christ ministered in connection with the *heavenly* tabernacle. (Hebrews viii. 2; ix. 11.)

(2) Aaron was a human priest, Christ was at once God and Man in one Person.

(3) Aaron offered for his own sins as well as for the people's sins, Christ offered only for His people's sins.

(4) Aaron's sin-offering for the people consisted of two animals, Christ's offering for sin consisted of Himself alone. He was both Priest and Victim.

(5) Aaron evidently collected some of the blood of the sin-offering in a vessel in order to sprinkle it on and before the mercy seat. Christ's blood was shed, but not collected in a vessel, and never literally sprinkled.

(6) The body of Aaron's sin-offering was burnt without the camp. Christ's body was reverently buried and saw no corruption. Moreover, it is expressly taught that Christ fulfilled this part of the type merely by suffering on the Cross without the gate of Jerusalem.

“The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, *are burned* without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate.” (Hebrews xiii. 11, 12.)

In the one case the bodies were “*burned without the camp*”. In the other case the type was fulfilled by the human body of Jesus *suffering on the Cross without the gate*.

The bodies of the beasts had ceased to suffer when they were carried forth to be burned. Yet Christ fulfilled the type by the mere fact that His sufferings on the Cross took place outside Jerusalem. Surely this fact should prevent us from pressing the many details connected with the sin-offerings on the day of atonement.

(7) Aaron offered the sin-offering clothed with certain prescribed garments. Christ, when He offered Himself, was deprived of His garments, with the exception of a loin-cloth.

(8) Aaron offered the sin-offering once every year. Christ offered Himself once for all.

It needs to be remembered, too, that all the prescribed details given in Leviticus xvi. to make atonement for the priest and for the people were *carried out in one day*. The doctrine that Christ completed His atoning work on the day of His resurrection or, as some have suggested, forty days after His resurrection, would require two days with a longer or shorter interval between.

IV

THE TEACHING OF HEBREWS IX. 25-26

We read, "Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place with blood of others; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself".

In this passage Christ's offering of Himself is interpreted to mean His undergoing *suffering*, presumably the suffering on the Cross. If He offered Himself often He must often have suffered. Moreover, His offering Himself once, and the suffering involved in doing so, are said to correspond with the high priest entering the holy place every year with the blood of the sin-offering. It follows, therefore, that when Christ offered Himself and suffered on the Cross, He then and thereby fulfilled the type of the high priest entering the holy place with the blood of others. He then, therefore, completed the work of Atonement.

V

"IT IS FINISHED"

What can these great words (only one word in the Greek) mean, if they do not teach that Christ completed the work of atonement by His death? The Lord when regarding Himself as "no more in the world" said to His Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John xvii. 4, 11). Then on the Cross He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished", and He bowed His head and yielded up His human spirit (John xix. 30). As the God-man, while offering Himself to God on the Cross, He was both in heaven and on earth at the same time. As the great High Priest of His people He was ministering in connection with the heavenly tabernacle, and having "once offered Himself (on the Cross) to bear the sins of many" by dying on the Cross the Just One for the unjust, His human spirit there and then entered heaven, having by His finished and atoning death obtained eternal redemption for His people. Hence the way into the holiest was there and then made manifest, and was there and then symbolized by the veil of the temple being rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

If His believing people now are privileged, while still on earth, to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and to draw near to the throne of grace, what could hinder Christ from ministering in connection with the heavenly tabernacle while still on the Cross ?

Why did the Father send Him, and what was the work which He gave Him to do ? The answer surely is, God “sent forth His Son to redeem them that were under the law”. And how and when did He redeem them ?

Let the Apostle answer : “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us : for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree’ ” (Galatians iii. 13). The Lord’s people, then, were redeemed by Christ being made a curse for them on the tree. It was then that they were redeemed with His precious blood. Their redemption was then in the Divine purpose fully and completely accomplished. It was the gift of His life as a ransom for many which secured their redemption, not any act subsequent to His resurrection. He was delivered over to death because of their offences, and He was raised again because He had by His obedience unto death secured their justification. He put away their sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Hence it is no longer imputed to them. If atonement for sin were not completed till after His resurrection, then sin was not put away till then, and He must have been bearing our sins until He had specially or formally ascended so as to complete the work of atonement. This, however, would be contrary to the Scriptures already cited.

VI

The late Dr. S. P. Tregelles says, “Romans iv. 25 plainly teaches that our Lord ‘was delivered in consequence of our offences, and raised again *in consequence of our justification*’. The preposition in each case is the same, so that just as His death resulted from His bearing our sins, so did His resurrection result from the accomplishment of that propitiation whereby we receive pardon and peace. Some speak of our sins ‘being buried in the grave of Jesus’ ; but how could they get there ? The Cross was the last place where He had to do with sin ; the shedding of His blood, the laying down of His life, was the payment of the full redemption price. He Himself bore our sins up to the tree ;

but on the completion of His sacrifice, all that had to do with sin was ended ; and He was laid in the grave, not as then the Sin-Bearer, but as the Holy One Who *had borne* the full penalty. Of this the resurrection was the full proof. If the weight of sin rested on Him when buried, how could it have been removed ? It is true that our sin had laid Him in the grave, because He had died to put it away ; but it was no longer on Him when He was there. On Romans iv. 25, see, *as to this point*, Bishop Horsley's sermon " (*The Hope of Christ's Second Coming*, p. 88 note).

BISHOP PEARSON'S VIEW

Bishop Pearson in his great work on the Creed (article, " He rose again ") says, " By His death we know that He suffered for sin, by His resurrection we are assured that the sins for which He suffered were not His own. Had no man been a sinner He had not died ; had He been a sinner, He had not risen again ; but dying for those sins which we committed, He rose from the dead *to show that He had made full satisfaction for them*, that we believing in Him might obtain remission of our sins, and justification of our persons.

" God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, and raising up our Surety from the prison of the grave, did actually absolve, and apparently acquit, Him from the whole obligation to which He had bound Himself, and in discharging Him acknowledged full satisfaction made for us."

VII

THE TEACHING SUGGESTED BY THE LORD'S SUPPER

Why was the sacrament of the Lord's Supper ordained ? The answer of the Reformers is, " For the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of *the death of Christ* ".

The *Westminster Confession* (Chapter XXIX, 1) says that the Lord's Supper was instituted " for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death ". The bread is to be taken in remembrance of His body broken, and the wine is to be drunk in remembrance of His blood shed for many to secure the remission of their sins. It is the *death of Christ* which we call to mind in the Lord's Supper, not anything connected with

His resurrection and ascension. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew *the Lord's death* till He come" (1 Corinthians xi. 26).

And why are the Lord's people instructed to keep in constant memory His death on the Cross? Is it not because that death secured their redemption? The Lord, when He took the cup into His hand said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Surely these words mean that *the shedding of His blood on the Cross did really and fully secure for all His people the remission of their sins*. Pardon and justification were secured by His blood shed on the Cross, and not by any act subsequent to His resurrection and ascension.

PROFESSOR SMEATON'S VIEW

In his able work on *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles*, the late Professor Smeaton says, "The entrance of our High Priest into the heavenly sanctuary may be considered *as taking place at the moment of Christ's death*, when He resigned His spirit to God, and His blood was poured forth upon the Cross: then He appeared before His Father and Judge. All the ceremonies on the great day of atonement corresponded with this view, for the atonement for the people of Israel was not consummated till the sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant.

"The figure therefore corresponds with the *Lord's entrance into heaven immediately after His death, when soul and body were sundered*, and not with the idea of a triumphant entrance into heaven, as it took place at His ascension, with all the jubilee belonging to a coronation day. In the type everything assumes that the whole was completed on the atonement day. And Christ's resurrection on the third day, equivalent and parallel to the return of the high priest from the holy of holies, was a proof that He had entered with His own blood, and been accepted. . . . The expression 'He offered Himself', in the historical tense, *refers not to an action in heaven, but to what was done on the Cross*. The appearing in the presence of God for us is said to be now, and is expressed by a different word (Hebrews ix. 24). We have explained what was meant by entering the holy of holies, and proved that the slaying of the Victim was only one element in the sacrifice, requiring to be followed by

sprinkling the mercy seat, as completing the expiation and the principal act of sacrifice. *All this was done in humiliation, and at the moment of death, when Christ entered within the veil, still a High Priest when disembodied.*

“The rending of the veil attested the fact. *The completion of the atonement was not reserved for the ascension to heaven, into which the Lord was to enter as His reward, not to complete His atoning work. The entire atonement was in humiliation* (Leviticus xvi. 6, 9; 1 Peter iii. 18; 2 Corinthians v. 21)” (pp. 381, 391; italics ours).

ARCHDEACON TAYLOR'S VIEW

The late Archdeacon Taylor, D.D., Archdeacon of Liverpool, in an admirable paper on “Is Christ now Offering”, delivered at a meeting in Manchester in October 1895, has some good remarks on this subject. He says, “By some it is held that when our Lord entered into heaven, forty days after the resurrection, He took with Him His precious blood and sprinkled it, as it were, on the Throne, and so purified the heavenly things themselves from the defilement of man’s guilt; just as the high priest, after he offered the sin-offering at the altar of burnt offering, took a bowl of the blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat.

“I cannot, I confess, hold that view. It would interpose a strange and abnormal delay between the completion of the sacrifice and the application of it in the Holy of Holies, i.e. in Heaven itself.

“Look at the type. The sprinkling of the blood was simply the last detail of one continuous transaction; it followed immediately on the completion of the sacrifice. I do not suppose that more than forty seconds elapsed between the two actions—not forty days. The high priest had only to walk some thirty feet from the brazen altar through the outer compartment of the tabernacle, to reach the ark in the inner one; in fact, the completion of the sacrifice and the subsequent sprinkling of the blood on the mercy seat were as nearly as possible instantaneous or simultaneous. It could not be more so under the circumstances.

“I take it, therefore, that as soon as ever the sacrifice was completed by the death of the Sacred Victim, by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, that moment the precious blood was sprinkled, as it were in heaven, i.e. applied by the great High

Priest Himself, and at the same moment accepted by the Eternal Father. The proof of this was in the *rent veil*. St. Matthew tells us that as soon as ever Christ gave up the Ghost, 'Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom' (xxvii. 51), which indicated the completion and acceptance of the sacrifice, and the removal of every barrier to free, unrestricted access into the immediate presence of our now reconciled God and Father. And further, I take it, that through that rent veil, as it were, the human soul of Christ, in hypostatic union with the Person of the Eternal Son of God, entered into the presence of God as the sinless Representative of the redeemed (Luke xxiii. 43, 46).

"As their Representative He had borne the guilt of their sins on His body on the tree, but with His expiring breath that guilt was expiated, and thus even before His formal ascension, He, as our Forerunner, entered for us within the veil."

In conclusion, it is the firm view of the present writer that our Lord Jesus Christ completed His work of atonement when He died upon the Cross.

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