

ARTICLE VI.

JEHOVAH'S PROTEST AGAINST THE ALTAR SERVICE.

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WHEN the altar service in the Jewish Church became more formal than vital, Jehovah protested against it in the strong language of Isa. i. 11-15, and Jer. vi. 20 and vii. 21-23. In the protest is pointed out the true and acceptable service, the service of obedience. In this article we would consider: (1) The Import of the Altar Service; (2) The Use and Meaning of *Blood* in Sacrificial Offering; (3) The New Testament Use of these Old Testament Symbols.

THE IMPORT OF THE ALTAR SERVICE.

It will serve our purpose to take the one which typifies the office and mission of the Messiah. In the sin-offering, the priest took the life of the ox, the lamb, or whatever animal was chosen, the best and most precious of the flock, without spot or blemish, and confessing, for or with the persons bringing the offering, their sins, and, sprinkling the altar with some of the blood which had been shed, burned the flesh upon the altar as an offering to Jehovah, while the penitent sinner received the blessing of pardon and the joy of reconciliation.

We observe: (1) that this offering cost something—it was the choicest of the flock, perhaps the pet of the household; (2) that its life was surrendered for another life; (3) that only as the one bringing the offering looked upon that life as given for himself, in penitence of heart accepted

it as for his own life, did he receive the pardon of the Lord and the assurance of forgiveness.

The whole altar service was a great moral object-lesson, teaching (1) that sin meant the loss of life and the destruction of the soul; (2) that God could not smile on a sinning and unforgiven people; (3) that salvation from sin could not be without such an expression of divine disapproval of all transgression, yoked with divine mercy, that the transgressor of the law would feel the heinousness of sin and the loving-kindness of forgiveness, and thus be led into a life of obedience. The whole service had this end in view; for, said Jehovah, "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you."

It is easy for any stated service to degenerate into a mere formality, a mechanical action in which there is no heart, no real penitence, no realization of the fact that a life is being surrendered in place of that of the transgressor, and that the gracious acceptance of that surrendered life is the condition of taking away the sin from the transgressor himself. As a matter of fact, the altar service had thus degenerated in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah; hence Jehovah's protest.

THE USE AND MEANING OF BLOOD IN SACRIFICIAL OFFERING.

We read, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission" of sins. It is important, then, that we know what is meant by such language. The expressions "surrendering its life," "giving its life," "taking its life," are in harmony with the true import of "bloody sacrifice." The Old Testament states that "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. xvii. 11). Has science gotten beyond that statement? If the life is in the nerves, or spinal cord,

or ganglia of the brain, the expression would have to be changed to meet the facts of modern discovery; but, as still looked at from the scientific point of view, the expression is true to fact, and certainly need not in any way mislead the popular mind.

The shedding of blood without which there is no remission of sins means, then, the surrender of life for life. What, then, was the significance of the sprinkling of shed blood upon the altar of sacrifice? It was a token of cleansing, of purification. But how can blood, which *defiles*, be used to *cleanse*? Simply because it meant the *life* of the victim, and therefore the *life* of the transgressor. *The penitent, then, was cleansing his life through his offering unto the Lord.* From this point of view the "bloody sacrifice," the offering of one's very life to God, was most impressive in its moral teaching, beautiful in its service, and in no way repulsive.

Some shrink from the expression *blood* in the Jewish and Christian religions, because they think of the material blood, instead of the *life* for which it stands in both Testaments. It is the mechanical action in the service, the material substance, from which they shrink, and which unconsciously, it may be, they transfer to the Christian conception of the atonement, and so reject the doctrine. Now is it too much to say that the Lord protests against such a gross and materialistic view of the atonement just as emphatically as he did against the formal altar service? But it may be said, "Is not this the common conception? Does not blood atonement mean just this?" That may depend upon whether we interpret *blood* as it is interpreted in the Scriptures, or as it is seen on the battlefield! It means *life* in the altar service, *life* in the doctrine of the atonement, and can in no sense be repulsive to the most sensitive but understanding heart. It is the perversion of its use that repels.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT SYMBOLS.

In the light of the above interpretation, we can profitably consider some of the New Testament passages about the power of Jesus' blood. John says, "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). To make this a little more clear, we should bear in mind the testimony of John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). We also read that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John iii. 16). The Son of God is also the Son of man, and acts for humanity. As the Lamb of God he is the sin-offering, taking away the sin of the world; for God "hath made him to be sin [a sin-offering] for us" (2 Cor. v. 21). He steps into our place, and bears upon himself the stripes by which we are healed. It is in the highest and truest sense of the word his *life* that cleanses us, saves us, and translates us into his own image. As that life of sacrifice for man is accepted by us in faith, pardon is granted, and we become children of God, adopted into the household of faith.

The cleansing of our life through his life is conditioned upon our walking in the light as he is in the light, or *in faith and obedience living the Christ life on earth*. Accepting him who lived and died for us is present salvation; walking in the light as he is in the light is continued salvation. It was not an altar, but a cross, upon which the Lamb of God was placed. But it is not the method of his death which is so important, as is the fact that he gave up his life for us; and this *vicarious sacrifice* involves his birth, growth, private and public life, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection, and the ever-living Christ, making inter-

cession in our behalf. It is the surrender of life, rather than the shedding of blood, that makes the atonement complete. But, as illustrative of the altar service, which typified the offering of himself, as a concession, it may be, to the weakness of man, who needed the analogy to complete his faith, as an expression of infinite and yearning love for man, Jesus did shed his blood, that his vicarious sacrifice might not be misunderstood. Jesus, however, condemned the slavish and literal interpretation of the statements of great truths, which cannot be bound into concise expressions. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John vi. 63). Paul also said, "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. iii. 6). Living truth is not bound into scientific or philosophical terms. Creeds are tentative; truth is like the growing tree.

This view of the offering of Jesus asks for an explanation of the use of the word "propitiation" in the Scriptures. There are only three passages in the English Testament where this word appears, but the Greek Testament gives four, and their use hardly justifies the definition of the term given in our English dictionaries. The two words translated "propitiation" are derived from the verb *ἱλάσκομαι* (*hilaskomai*), which means "to be propitious to," "favorable to," "merciful to," and therefore "to make atonement for one." It is used in the expression "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13), and in the phrase "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. ii. 17). The adjective *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilastarion*) is used substantively, the word *ἐπίθεμα* (*epithema*), "covering," being understood, thus meaning "mercy-seat," referring to the Temple service, and is translated in Heb. ix. 5, "mercy-seat," or "propitiatory," where God manifests his mercy to the people through the offering of the High Priest.

The other passage where the adjective form is used in the same way is in Rom. iii. 25, where Paul says of the Christ, "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation [or propitiatory] through faith by his blood." Thus as High Priest, the Christ enters into the holy of holies, and sprinkles his own blood upon the mercy-seat, or through his atoning life obtains for man the mercy of God. The noun *ἱλασμός* (*hilasmos*) is used twice in the First Epistle of John. John says that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins" (ii. 2), and that God "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (iv. 10), and that this is a proof of the *divine love*.

In these passages it is *mercy, love, forgiveness*, which cling to the word, and *not* the appeasing of the wrath of an angry God! That mercy, love, forgiveness, come through an offering which honors and maintains divine law is conceded. It is this, taken in connection with the transformation of man through the renewing of his spirit, that makes it safe for God to forgive sinners, and bring them into the divine fellowship of light, love, and truth. But when the wrath of God, or, as the Revelator puts it, the *wrath of the Lamb*, is revealed, men look not for salvation, but cry out for the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them "from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. vi. 16, 17.) That wrath is not linked with salvation, but with judgment!

Still further, there *can be no forgiveness without sacrifice,—without the surrender of something valuable*. Let me illustrate: One strikes a fellow with a cruel blow. He feels the biting smart, for not only has the law of fellowship been violated, not simply has the body been hurt, but the very life has been touched. Now the injured one cannot forgive the wanton act without giving up something of his very life in that act of forgiveness. He suffers for

the other in forgiving him. He sacrifices himself, in a measure, for the evil-doer, or else the forgiveness is not complete. If he punish him, the evil-doer may receive his just deserts, but is he then the object of forgiveness? But if, in his person, he represents the state, and the majesty of the law is involved, his forgiveness must be manifested in such a way as to make it clear to all that law cannot be transgressed with impunity. This Jesus did when he stood in our place, and bent his back to the stroke of sin, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. iii. 13).

We sin against God. That he may forgive the penitent sinner, he surrenders something of his very life in the gift of his only begotten Son, that he may be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth. In other words, the divine forgiveness involves the divine sacrifice. The law, "No forgiveness without sacrifice," runs through all human relations. It is illustrated in every home. It is the pledge of the cleansing of life, and the restoration of broken relations of fellowship. Sacrifice, which is the very essence of the atonement, enters into every true life, and makes that life a vicarious offering. In proportion as we bear the image of the Christ are we also bearing upon our hearts the sins of others, and giving our very life for others; not as did the Christ, but as the Christ in us is doing daily.

Many have looked upon redemption in a formal way, and mechanically have accepted a system of Christian doctrine, instead of receiving the living Christ. How far removed is such formal faith from the altar service, against which Jehovah protested, and declared that such service he hated? The acceptable life is that of loving obedience, of constant service, and it is for such that the cleansing of the Christ avails, for a forgiven soul must respond to the act of forgiveness, or forgiveness ceases of necessity to operate.

We see, then, how God can forgive without giving up his scepter. Infinite love found the way, and that way, in limited form and power, is reproduced in human life as it is translated into the image of his dear Son, and we know that the way is holy and true and sufficient. It is a way from which we do not shrink, because it is so true to human life. It is the way of love, and God's mercy glorified it, as did the Shekinah the mercy-seat. It is the living way, for it is centered in the living Christ, and is resplendent with the glory of heaven; and "if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood [the very life] of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Against that cleansing, and the consequent Christian service, there will be no protest from the Lord and King.

Our system of theology, our preaching and our teaching, should be centered in the *living Christ*, who is the all-sufficient help, Saviour, Lord and King for men in their struggle against sin. Through his acceptance, and in his service, man, under the guidance of the Spirit, is translated into the image of the Son of God, and is made to reflect the majesty, gentleness, love, and glory of the Christ in his daily life. Religion thus becomes *vital*, instead of formal; worship becomes the expression of the heart's deepest needs and feelings, instead of being mechanical in its service; the gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation *from sin*, and the church, whose head is the Christ, is in very truth the body whose normal activity represents the Kingdom of God on earth.