

## THE ATONEMENT – Lev. 16

"The day of atonement" had a very prominent place in the "feasts of Jehovah" which the children of Israel were commanded to observe. It was "an holy convocation" on the tenth day of the seventh month in each year. So important and solemn was it, when carried out according to the direction which Jehovah gave by Moses that all in Israel were bound to cease from work, and to afflict their souls, or they would be destroyed from among the people. They were to look on, and see how Aaron, by the sin-offering and burnt-offering, made an atonement for all their sins. It was done "once a year" to typify that one sacrifice which Christ offered once for all.

In the chapter **(Lev. 16)** which gives the details of what was done on the great Day of Atonement, the word "atonement" occurs fifteen times; and the work is presented to us in three different aspects or parts of the one atonement - propitiation, substitution, and acceptance. All were fulfilled in the one offering of Christ, for "*it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*" **(Lev. 17:11)** Thus by the atonement made by our Lord Jesus Christ we are brought to God in the perfect efficacy of His work, and accepted in virtue of His offering. We are thus entitled to present rest and peace as well as eternal glory, and our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and praise.

1. PROPITIATION was for God, though about our sins. It is brought before us repeatedly in the New Testament, and always in reference to sins. "*He is the propitiation for our sins;*" God "*sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins;*" "*a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*"

Propitiation gives us the Godward side of the finished work of Christ. **(See 1 John 2: 2, 4: 9; Heb. 2: 17)**

As another has said, "God was not as a heathen god, one who had to be propitiated that He might not be against us, but He did require that righteousness and holiness should be maintained in the universe." Man had sinned, had rebelled against God, and dishonoured His throne, which righteously called for the pouring out of divine wrath and judgment; and though God is love, and loves sinners, yet is He righteous and holy in all His ways.

What was then to be done? for the claims of His throne in dealing with His creature man must be unsparingly met, and His righteousness and truth vindicated. God gave His Son. Divine love and wisdom brought in propitiation - "*not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"

Propitiation then met the claims of the throne of God as to our sins. Hence, in this, the first part of the work of atonement, the blood of the sin-offering was carried by the high priest into the holiest of all - the presence of God - accompanied with a cloud of burning incense which covered the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, when Aaron took of the blood and sprinkled it with his finger **upon** the mercy-seat, and then sprinkled it seven times **before** the mercy-seat. **(vv. 12-14)** The cloud of incense set forth the sweetness of the excellencies of Christ, and the blood the value of His atoning work for us in the presence of God. There was that now before the eye of God which spoke of propitiation for sins, of divine judgment, and blood-shedding for remission. Such was the type on the great day of atonement.

But when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom all these shadows pointed, we are taught that He "*once suffered for sins,*" "*died for our sins,*" rose again from among the dead, and went *into heaven itself by His own blood*, now to appear before the face of God for us.

Christ is thus in heaven for us, the everlasting witness that **propitiation** for sins has been made; and the infinite and eternal efficacy of His blood is always before God. The claims of God's throne have, therefore, been righteously and fully met for all that come to God by Him; for Christ died for all. Because of this, God can now send out a world-wide message of forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, and as "*a just God and a Saviour*" welcome, and justify from all things, every one that believes in Jesus. As we have seen, the whole value of His accomplished work is always before God; for Jesus Christ the Righteous is there, and He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world; so that God can now say, as to every sinner who comes to Him for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, "*Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom,*" or, as the margin reads, "*an atonement.*" **(Job 33:24)** Thus the believer has a place of perfect peace in God's presence in divine righteousness, and the gospel is sent freely to every creature under heaven.

2. SUBSTITUTION is another aspect or part of the work of atonement. If *propitiation* fully met the claims of the throne of God, *substitution* fully meets our need, and purges our conscience.

That another should suffer instead of the guilty, and atonement made thereby, was often taught by Old Testament types. In Abraham's offering up a ram *in the stead of his son* we have the idea of substitution; and in convicted ones bringing sin-offerings, laying their hands upon the head of the offering, and in this way, as it were, transferring their sins to it, then the victim killed, the blood sprinkled, and the fat burnt; and the word of God declaring that in this way atonement was made, and on this account the offerer was forgiven, the blessed truth of substitution was plainly set forth. In this chapter we find *two* goats set apart for a sin-offering, and on the head of one of them Aaron laid both his hands, and confessed over him *all* the iniquities of the children of Israel, and *all* their transgressions in *all* their sins, *putting them upon* the head of the goat, and sending him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. **(Lev. 16: 21)**

Thus we see in type *all* the sins of the people transferred to another and taken away. And in a coming age Israel's song of joy and deliverance will be, when calling to mind the sufferings and death of Messiah for their sins, "*Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*" **(Isa. 53: 4-6)**

This is **substitution**. Jehovah laid the iniquity of His people upon Christ, and judged it all upon Him. God only could do this. He only could separate sins from us and lay them on Another. This He did to the praise of the glory of His grace. For this we praise Him now, and, in millennial days, Israel will triumphantly celebrate this goodness of Jehovah; for not only will they bless Jehovah because He forgiveth all their iniquities and healeth all their diseases, but they will add, "*As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.*" **(Ps. 103: 3, 12)** They will see that their sins were taken by Jehovah from them and laid upon Christ, and that He was wounded and bruised for them. This is *substitution*; and the same principle of dealing with our sins is set before us in the New Testament.

Our Lord said that His blood was shed *for many* for the remission of sins. In the **Hebrews 9:28** we are told that Christ was once offered to bear *the sins of many*; and if an ancient prophet declared "*He shall bear their iniquities,*" the apostle to the circumcision says, "*Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree . . . by whose stripes we are healed.*" **(Matt. 26: 28; Heb. 9: 28; Isa. 53:5; 1 Peter 2: 24)**

Here we have substitution plainly set forth. Our sins laid upon Jesus, He Himself bearing them, and we healed by His stripes. Elsewhere we read that He "*once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God;*" "*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.*" So far we see how truly the Lord Jesus Christ has been our substitute as the bearer of our sins, and also of the righteous judgment for which they called.

But He was not only "*delivered for our offences,*" but He who knew no sin was "*made sin for us,*" and so bore instead of us the judgment due to sin in the flesh - our evil nature. Hence we are told that "*our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed.*" After "*the fat of the sin-offering*" had been burnt upon the altar in token of God's estimate of the value of the offering, the flesh and skin and dung of the victim were carried outside the camp and then burnt - all treated as unclean, thus plainly setting forth Christ "*made sin for us,*" and coming under divine judgment for us, when God condemned "*sin in the flesh.*"

Thus the nature from which the sins sprang has been judged, and set aside righteously in divine judgment in the death of Christ - "*God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin [or by a sacrifice for sin] condemned sin in the flesh.*" Therefore we now have no place in the flesh before God. Christ having been raised up from among the dead and glorified, He hath sent forth His Spirit into our hearts. "*Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.*"

How truly then the type has been fulfilled in the atoning work of Christ, so that *all* our iniquities, *all* our transgressions in *all* our sins, are for ever gone by death and divine judgment; and a just God and Saviour can say of all who believe, "*Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more*" **(Heb. 10: 17)**, so perfect and real is the work of Christ *for* us. But this is not all. There is a third thing - acceptance.

3. ACCEPTANCE. After Aaron had carried in the blood and sprinkled it *upon* and *before* the mercy-seat, and had come out and confessed, with hands laid upon the goat, *all* the sins of the children of Israel and sent him away, we are told that he took his burnt-offering and the burnt-offering of the people to make *an atonement* for himself and for the people.

The burnt-offering was a sweet-savour offering; it was not, therefore, about sins, like the sin-offering. Yet we find it was killed, the blood sprinkled, etc.; and though the offerer laid his hands upon it, it was not, as in the sin-offering, to typically transfer the sins of the offerer, but to identify himself with its acceptability.

We read, therefore, in the inspired account of the burnt-offering, "*it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*" (Lev. 1:4)

Atonement then in its application includes the precious truth of acceptance by virtue of Christ.

The offerer was accepted with the burnt-offering. This is no doubt why it was offered after propitiation and substitution had been plainly set forth. The burnt-offering was most acceptable to God. All was burnt on the altar to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord. So the death of Christ, under the searching power of divine judgment, showed the perfectness of obedience, love, faith, and entire surrender to the will of God in the most trying circumstances, and was infinitely acceptable to God. In it God found a savour of rest; and as what the Saviour did was for us, as well as for the glory of God, it is accepted for us. Thus the believer, by the atoning work of Christ, is not only delivered in righteous judgment from guilt and condemnation, but he is brought to God, and has a place always before him of acceptance in virtue of that one offering which was once offered.

Our faith and hope then are in God. It was God who sent His own Son. (Gen. 22:8) It was God who delivered Him up for us all, who raised Him up from among the dead, and glorified Him as man at His own right hand. It is God who still sends forth the glad tidings of eternal salvation by Christ alone; it is God that justifieth the ungodly who believe; it is God to whom we are now brought through faith in Christ Jesus; it is the love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us; it is God who keeps us by His power through faith unto salvation; and it is His Son from heaven for whom we wait to take us to the Father's house, to be forever to the praise of His glory.

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