



CHRIST'S
PRESENT MINISTRY.

PART II.

ADVOCACY; OR FEET WASHING.

BY

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PART II.

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IN considering the subject that forms the title of this paper let us turn to two passages in the New Testament—one in the first epistle of John (chaps. i. ii.), the other in his gospel (chap. xiii. 1–7). These scriptures bring before us one branch of the service carried on now by the Lord Jesus in heaven on behalf of His redeemed ones who are still on earth. The other branch is His Priesthood, which has been dwelt upon in another paper.*

* CHRIST'S PRESENT MINISTRY. *Part I. Priesthood.*

Now it is necessary for our souls to be perfectly clear as to the fact that the present ministry of our Lord for us is *based* on the *work* which He *completed* when down here, by which the sins of the believer have been absolutely and for ever put away (Heb. x. 17), sin in the flesh condemned (Rom. viii. 3), and judgment executed, and past, because infinitely endured by the Lord Jesus as our substitute on the cross.

A thousand difficulties which believers are troubled with would be avoided did they at the outset of their Christian career but apprehend clearly what has been

accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ, and then the nature of His *present* service in heaven would get its distinctive and peculiarly blessed place in their souls.

From whence come all the doubts and fears so constantly found in the hearts of God's dear children? How is it that souls are not more generally resting without question and in peace upon His finished work? And why is it that "assurance of salvation" is so frequently thought to be the privilege of a few, instead of what it is—the common and proper blessing of *all* the family of God on earth?

Just because what we call

“Christ’s *finished* work” is not really *believed* to be *finished*, and *self* is looked to, to supplement by feelings, or faith, or walk, or experience, what admits of no addition ; and this again results from not having honestly believed God, that “in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell.” (Rom. vii. 18, New Trans.)

Reader, are you doubting your salvation ? And if so, why ? Is it because you don’t feel happy ? or because you have not love enough ? or because you live so inconsistently ? Ah ! you are looking at self, and confounding the value God sets upon Christ’s work for you, with your own poor esti-

mate of it as proved by your walk or experience. What a mistake!

Your (the believer's) sins, past, present, and to come (only we should not think of or expect to sin in the future), have been atoned for by the Lord Jesus on the cross. Sin in the flesh—the source from whence they came—has been condemned in His death (Rom. viii. 3); and God sees you now alive in Christ risen, “accepted in the Beloved,” and “made the righteousness of God in Him.” (Eph. i. 6; 2 Cor. v. 21.)

All the evil of your nature, the badness of your heart, and the short-comings of your Christian course, were fully before the mind

of God when Jesus died; and there a complete end of all that you are, as well as all that you have done, was *judicially* made.

“Yes,” says some believer, “I see that the Lord bore all my *past* sins, but what am I to do about my *everyday* and my *future* sins? This is what troubles me so much.”

Such a question is, I am persuaded, but expressing the difficulty of great numbers of the Lord's dear people, and it is my earnest desire in dwelling a little on this point that many of them may be led to see the fallacy that lies at the root of it. For before we can profitably look into the subject more immediately before

us, it is necessary to be perfectly clear as to this question of eternal forgiveness.

To such then I would put this question, *When* were your sins atoned for? The answer must be, On Calvary more than 1800 years ago.

How many of your sins were "*future*" when the Lord Jesus died for them? *All* were future of course—*all* the sins of your lifetime, from birth until death, or until the Lord comes.

Then, when you speak of your "future sins," you mean the sins you committed after your conversion. But, dear reader, consider. Did the Lord Jesus only make

atonement for the sins you committed up to the date of your conversion, and leave out any you might commit after that date? Surely this is not the case.

When He died for you He bore *all* your sins right on to the end of your path. **THEY WERE ALL FUTURE TO CHRIST WHEN HE BORE THEM.** Not one of them had then been committed; you had not then been born, much less "born again;" and therefore you cannot but see that it is a foolish mistake to make a distinction between the sins committed before and after your conversion, where *atonement*, or your own acceptance with God on the ground of it, is concerned.

That there *is* a difference, and a very important one, I do not deny. In the *one* case, they were the sins of a poor unsaved, unregenerate sinner, who could do nothing but sin; in the *other* case, they were the sins of a child of God, whose privilege and responsibility it is to walk in holiness.

But do not imagine that the Lord Jesus had not *all* your sins, of every sort, and of each period of your life, upon Him when He gave Himself for you to death.

Why, to maintain such a doctrine would be, in principle, to reduce Christianity to the level of Judaism.

Turn to Heb. ix. and x., and

see the contrast there drawn between the two systems as to this very point. On the great day of atonement—once a year (Lev. xvi.)—the high priest made atonement (in figure) for all the sins of Israel for the past year. Two goats were taken, one of which was slain, and its blood carried into the holiest of all by the high priest, and sprinkled *upon* and *before* the mercy-seat. Upon the head of the other goat were confessed the sins of the people; it was then led away, and let go in the wilderness; and we read that “on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that

ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." (v. 30.)

But, alas ! for the sinner who lived in that day this cleansing did not go for much ; for " the Holy Ghost " was thus " signify- ing that the way into the holiest of all was *not yet made manifest*, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing : which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that *could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.*"

The great day of atonement was the important day ; for it was only on that day—once in each year—that the high priest

went into the holiest of all, and placed the blood on and before the mercy-seat, which laid the foundation of Jehovah's relationship with Israel. But forgiveness of sins in an absolute sense could not be proclaimed, and was not known.

The consequence was, that each fresh sin required a fresh sacrifice, and the forgiveness then pronounced had reference only to each particular offence. (Lev. iv. 26, 31, 35.)

So that whether we look at the broad basis upon which the whole Levitical system rested, as presented in the sacrifices of the great day of atonement (Lev. xvi.),

or at the everyday sacrifices for sins in detail (Lev. iv.), all was imperfect. "For the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never, with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect."

The sacrifice of Christ was pointed to, no doubt, by the blood of these animals shed for 1500 years. But the results of the one system are in direct contrast to the results of the other, inasmuch as the reality infinitely exceeded all that could be shadowed forth in the type. And this the following passages will prove :

The Law.

“Could *not* make him that did the service *perfect*, as pertaining to the conscience.”
(Heb. ix. 9.)

The Gospel.

“By one offering He hath *perfected for ever* them that are *sanctified*.” “How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . *purge your conscience?*” “The worshipper *once purged* [has] *no more conscience of sins*.”
(Chap. x. 14 ; ix. 14 ; x. 2.)

The Law.

“A *remembrance* again made of sins every year.” (Chap. x. 3.)

The Gospel.

“Their sins and iniquities will I *remember no more*.” (Chap. x. 17.)

The Law.

“Every priest *standeth* daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” (Chap. x. 11.)

The Gospel.

“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever *sat down* on the right hand of God.” (Chap. x. 12.)

Now here are three points of direct contrast as to the results ; namely :

1. The conscience is purged, perfected for ever.

2. Sins are forgiven and forgotten.

3. And the One who accomplished the work has *sat down* at God's right hand, because His work was so perfectly done that there was no more a question to be raised or settled as to sin.

People will admit the difference between the *value* of the sacrifice of an animal and of the Son of God ; but as to the *results*, the constant tendency all over Christendom is to limit the

practical blessings flowing from the work of the Lord Jesus to that which resulted from the Levitical order of things.

The great point of contrast I desire to press here, however, is this: The blood of bulls and goats served only to bring sins to constant remembrance. The blood of Christ has purged the believer's sins, and God's testimony being believed as to the perfection of that blood, his conscience as to them is perfected for ever. The efficacy of the blood is eternal, and on the ground of it God could look all along the ages prospectively, and not only put away the believer's sins up to

the date of his conversion, but all the sins of his lifetime.

How blessed to know and tenaciously cling to the fact that our "sins and iniquities He will remember no more," and that there never can be any interruption to our constant, unchanging *acceptance* with God, which is unaffected by any state of ours!

From this it must be clear, that if a believer sins again, God has not ceased to love him, and this sin does not come up against him for future judgment. Assuredly not. It has been met by judgment infinitely executed, and therefore for ever past. The work of Christ on Calvary would have to

be undone, and the blood to lose its value in God's sight, before these things could take place.

But although his salvation is not touched, his enjoyment of it has been interrupted. His happiness as a child in the Father's presence has been broken, and communion would never again be possible, were it not for the present ministry of Christ as the Advocate or Restorer of our souls.

How soon after the truth of redemption was brought home to us, giving us salvation and peace with God, did we allow the flesh to get up again and lead us into sin and sorrow! Ah! what vile hearts we have! We thought

perhaps we had done with sinning for the future ; but, alas ! though God gives us the power to resist the devil, and tells us to “ walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh ” (Gal. v. 16), the flesh is in us still, in all its old, unchanged evil (though we are not in it, if the Spirit of God dwell in us), and ready at any moment to break out in rebellion against God, should we grow careless, and take our eyes off the Lord Jesus, and fail in the energy of faith that reckons ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Him.

Not that the *existence* of an evil nature in us need disturb

communion with God (for none of us could ever enjoy it on earth if that were the case), but *allowing* it, even in the smallest thought or act, does. And, as has been said, if communion be broken, and our souls have lost their happiness, the service on high of the Lord Jesus becomes necessary before we can be restored.

His Priesthood is exercised in connection with our WEAKNESS (not sins) to maintain us in consistency with our place in the cloudless light before God, that we may not sin.

His Advocacy is exercised in connection with our SINS AND FAILURES, to *restore* us to fellow-

ship with the Father when we *have* sinned.

The epistle to the Hebrews treats of the one, and the passages alluded to in the epistle and gospel of John deal with the other. It is with the latter we are now concerned.

The blessed Lord was about to "depart out of this world unto the Father." Having "come from God," we read "He went to God," the work the Father had given Him to do being *finished*. And now the question might arise, "Will He forget us when He is away at the Father's right hand?"

How sweetly the question is

answered by those words which follow: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Oh, no! He could not forget those for whom He bled and died. He has only passed from one scene of service on earth, to another scene of service in heaven.

He has said, as it were, in the language of the Hebrew servant, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free." (Exodus xxi.) His ears have been "digged" (compare Ps. xl. 6; Heb. x. 5; Isa. l. 4; Exodus xxi. 5, 6), and He has become a servant *for ever*.

As to the *past*. "The Son of

man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt. xx. 28.)

As to the *present*. He is serving us by His Priesthood, on the one hand, and as Advocate on the other. And

As to the *future*. He soon will come for us, to take us to be with Himself for ever; and then will He gird Himself once more, and make us to sit down to meat, and come forth and serve us. (Luke xii. 37.)

Well indeed may it be said, that having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them right on to the end.

Having by His death and resurrection absolutely fitted us for heaven, His ministry now on high is directed to making us *fit for earth*, seeking to keep us in communion with the Father and Himself, or to restore us if we fail.

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin *not*. And *if* any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous : and He is the propitiation for our sins.”
(1 John ii. 1, 2.)

You see it is not, “If any man sin, we have no hope,” or “never can call God Father again,” but, “If any man sin, we have an

advocate with the Father," who is the propitiation for our sins, and He proceeds to do what is necessary to restore our souls to the enjoyment of God's holy presence.

It is not that in the capacity of *Advocate* He intercedes for us with the *Father* when we *have* sinned. *That* He does as *Priest* with *God* to *prevent* us sinning. But when we disregard the warnings that ever go before, and give way to sin, then the *action* of the Lord Jesus is with *us*.

The expression, "We have an Advocate with the Father," would naturally convey the thought of pleading for us when we have

sinned ; but the translation is misleading, though it is difficult to substitute a better. It is the same Greek word as is rendered "comforter" in speaking of the Holy Ghost (John xiv. 16) ; but neither would that word convey the sense. It is One who manages our affairs. We have such an One with the Father, the full value of whose blood is ever before God, and on the ground of it He acts for and with us when failure has come in ; not, I judge, that He *does* anything with the Father, but He is *there* in all the perfection of His Person, and the unchangeable value of His work. The action is, as it seems to me,

wholly with us; and what that action is, John xiii. opens up.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded.”

Here we have in symbol the action which the Lord Jesus in deepest, richest grace proceeds to take as our Advocate to restore our souls to communion

when we have grieved and sinned against God.

It is sometimes rather lightly said, that if we have sinned we have but to confess the sin to God, and we shall be restored. There is truth in the statement, but it would convey a very shallow appreciation of the facts. For before there can be real self-judgment and confession the Lord Jesus has first to act. Think of the Son of God stooping to take our dirty feet into His hands! In other words, He has to reach down from His place in glory, and address Himself to our condition, and by applying the water of the Word (Eph. v. 26) to our

consciences and hearts, to bring home to us what a grievous thing it is to have *sinned in and against the Light* into which we have been brought !

If I have sinned and grieved my Father, I am just as much His child as ever ; but communion is absolutely broken ; I am not happy, and never again could I be so, if the Lord Jesus did not stoop down once more to my need, and apply the water of the Word to cleanse my conscience and heart of the defilement.

I believe the Lord sometimes allows us to remain for a while under the cloud we have brought

in between us and Himself, that He may produce a deeper judgment of the evil, and teach us how dependent we are upon Him for restoration to the enjoyed sense of His presence.

Peter resists the Lord; but how solemn are His words, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Communion broken cannot be restored without divine intervention. Confession of our failure *follows* this action, and cannot, to be real, precede it.

And is it not good for our souls to know that if we by carelessness have brought in a cloud, it is not in our power to remove it when we will, but are wholly

dependent for it upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Peter then yields, but makes the condition, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head;" to which the Lord replies, "He that is *bathed* needeth not save to *wash* his feet, but is clean every whit." The figure is very simple, and beautifully instructive.

The great washing or bathing took place when divine life was imparted to our souls (John iii. 5), and this *never* requires repetition. We are "clean every whit," according to the new life and nature we have received. The person might get his feet soiled,

however, on his return from having his whole body bathed, and they would therefore require re-cleansing.

Bear in mind that we are only once "*born* of water and of the Spirit" (chap. iii. 5); but, alas! how many times our *feet* have required to be washed again, because our *walk* has been bad.

"Clean every whit" is the unchanging condition of the believer, and never can a stain again appear *upon* him in the sight of God, not only because he has been cleansed and pardoned once, and for ever, but because he has been made partaker of the divine nature, which

last is more the thought in John xiii., both the bathing and the feet-washing being by water. The Blood, of course, is the foundation of all, as we read in 1 John i. 7—"If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Here we have three characteristics of the Christian position and condition as the apostle John presents them to us—the common and unchanging privileges of all believers, however little known.

1. We walk in the light.

2. We have fellowship one with another.

3. The blood cleanses from all sin.

If a man has divine life he must be walking *in* the light, though he may not be walking *according* to the light. "Now ARE ye light in the Lord: *walk as* children of light." (Eph. v. 8.)

1. What an awful thought it is, that if a child of God sins he sins *in the light*, because he cannot get out of it!

2. We have fellowship one with another, a family privilege belonging to all the children of God as such. Let us seek to enjoy it more thoroughly.

3. "And the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from

all sin." This is the property that belongs to the blood.

Mark well, this clause is not stating the remedy for a Christian's failure, which is the general thought. If this were so, it would read, "If we do NOT walk in the light . . . His blood . . . cleanseth us from all sin." But the passage says, "If we walk in the light," not, if we don't.

Provision for failure is to be found further on; but this verse is stating what is always true as to the value of the precious blood. It is sometimes contended that because the verb is in the present tense—"cleanseth"—it teaches that the blood goes

on cleansing the believer daily, which is a very great mistake.

The blood *has* cleansed us if we are children of God, and never requires to be reapplied, although, of course, its efficacy is ever before God as the ground of all His ways with us in love.

The passage, as has been said, is speaking in the abstract of three special features of the Christian position and privilege, and when it is said of the blood that it "cleanses us from all sin," the Spirit of God refers to the **PROPERTY** belonging to the blood.

The question here is not whether it *has* cleansed or *is*

cleansing, but that it is the property of the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, to cleanse us from all sin. As we might say of a medicine, "That medicine cures such and such a disease."

If we fail, it is not the blood, but another application of the *water* that is needed for the feet to restore us to the *enjoyment* of our place in the light, and to fellowship with the Father and the Son, and with one another.

The blood once shed has determined my place for ever as a child of God in the light, and it never requires re-application. My enjoyment of that place is quite another thing, and depends upon

my walk and behaviour; and where there is negligence as to this the blessed Lord applies the water of the Word to the conscience, and brings the erring one to judge himself, and this leads to confession.

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Observe, Scripture does not say, “If we pray for forgiveness,” but, “If we confess our sins.” It is a very much more difficult thing to make a true and real *confession* of our sin, tracing it out from the beginning, and to its source in our own

hearts, than merely to ask for forgiveness.

If we are honest and genuine in telling our God and Father all about it, judging ourselves in the most unsparing manner, He assures us He is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us. He owes it, so to speak, to the blood of Christ to do so.

Now this is the *Father's forgiveness* of His *child*, and we must not confound it with God's forgiveness of the *sinner as such* at his conversion.

As to this latter, we read (Acts xiii. 38), "Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins : and by Him all that believe are justified from all

things." This is *absolute* and for ever. His sins are *gone*, and never can judgment come upon him hereafter.

If I break down after I am saved, I have not lost my place in the family of God, nor do I need to come again as a guilty sinner to be pardoned. I am still a child of God as much as ever, but a naughty one, and cannot *enjoy* my Father's love. I need to be broken and humbled, and smashed to pieces in heart and conscience, and then after full confession, to receive *my Father's* forgiveness.

Had you a naughty child, would you turn that little one

out of doors, and disown it as your child, because it had sinned? Certainly not. Then why impute to our loving God what you would not tolerate in a human being?

Nay; but how gladly and ungrudgingly He yields to me His forgiveness! And then the clouds are broken, and once more the sun of my Father's countenance beams into my soul in all its warmth and brightness. I am now not only *in* the light, but I seek to walk *as* a child of light, and *enjoy* fellowship with the Father and the Son and the beloved people of God.

And the lesson—bitter as it has been—will not be forgotten, or

be barren of result ; for the Lord, in His wisdom and love, makes our very failures contribute to our blessing. We learn to be humble and dependent, and to walk softly, and keep in the sense of His grace, having proved the wretched character of our own hearts, and thus can be used to others. “If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet.” See what a different man Peter was after his fall from what he was before it ; and how blessedly he obeyed the words of his Master to him—“When thou art converted [restored], strengthen thy brethren.”

Marvellous indeed is the grace we have to do with, and full is the provision that grace has made for us, to keep us all our journey through,

“Till travelling days are done!”

Let us not then trifle with anything that would bring a cloud of moral distance between our souls and God. Let us beware of the very first thing that would approach to draw our hearts away from Him. And should anyone reading these words have departed in any measure from the Lord, oh, hasten back to Him! Tell Him all the sad story of your sin, lay your heart and conscience bare before Him, let His word

search you through and through, and then, with fullest grace and love, will the Father come in and heal your backslidings, giving you soon to taste again, and in deeper measure than ever, of the love and joy and comfort of His presence.

And soon the Lord Jesus will come and take us home, and we shall be done with all the difficulties and dangers and temptations of this scene of sin and sorrow, and our hearts shall rejoice in being perfectly like Him and with Him for evermore !

J. C. T.

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