

Propitiation and Cleansing.



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NEWPORT (Mon.): STOW HILL PUBLISHING OFFICE

LONDON: 15 PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

ONE PENNY.

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JOHN xix. 32-35 ; 1 JOHN v. 5-11 ; TITUS iii. 3-7.

EVERYONE who has been awakened to a sense of the condition in which we are by nature must have more or less realized the necessity of two things. First, there is the need of forgiveness of sins, and God forgives *righteously*, that is, He *justifies* the one who believes in Jesus. On the other hand, an awakened soul feels the need of a change wrought in it. Everybody will admit that we could not enter heaven with a sinful nature. Supposing all our sins were forgiven, it is impossible for a sinful being to go into heaven. This change is spoken of in one sense as conversion, and in another aspect of the work of God in us it is called new birth—a new divine principle of life in the soul, apart from which we could not live to God.

The passage I read in John's gospel is connected with these two things. First, there is blood-shedding ; forgiveness and justification are by the blood of Jesus. "He is the propitiation for our sins." Then water is spoken of in Scripture as that which morally cleanses (Ezek. xxxvi. 25).

We feel that all that which comes from the old evil nature needs to be washed away, evil desires, bad feelings, and so on. Now this is more than the thought, that if all our bad actions and sins were written in a book against us, the blood of Jesus can and does efface every one, and blot them out of God's sight. When the blood came from the side of Christ, it was the witness of His death, and of its efficacy ; but water also came forth with the blood, so that moral cleansing is by the death of Jesus, as well as propitiation for our sins. The Apostle John is very particular as to this. " But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true ; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." John bore witness that blood and water flowed from the side of Christ *when dead*. He had already given up His Spirit, and committed it to His Father, when the soldier pierced His side. John bare record of these facts.

In his epistle John refers, in the verses I have read, to these facts. " Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ ; not by water only, but by water and blood." We might have thought that it was impossible that the Son of

God should die, but He died as none other died. He Himself said, "No man taketh it (i.e., His life) from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." So far as men were concerned, they crucified and slew Him, but it remains true that He laid down His life. Nothing could more definitely show that He was the Son of God than the power to lay down His life and take it again. No one of us could give up his spirit, but Jesus did. We read sometimes in hymns of His languishing and dying, but Scripture says He cried with a loud voice, and then gave up His Spirit to the Father (Luke xxiii. 46). His death was different from anybody else's death. Death as the judgment of God is the common lot of humanity; "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment." There is no discharge in that war. But what Jesus did by dying was to turn death into the means of salvation, life, and blessing. Who could do that but the Son of God?

As to this let me give you a figurative illustration from the Old Testament. When a man brought an offering to the door of the tabernacle, if it were a lamb, he killed it. The priest did not kill the victim, the man could do that. Man can and

has brought in death, but that is as far as he can go. Adam received the sentence of death and had to die, and besides, he brought death upon the whole race of men ; "death passed upon all men." But man could not deal with death, another must come in ; the priest takes the shed blood and puts it on the altar. The priest is a figure of the Son of God ; He alone could turn death into propitiation and atonement. My own death could not atone for my sins, but in the death of the Lord Jesus atonement has been made, and His blood is the witness of it. In the case we are looking at the priest put the blood on the altar, that is, on the place where righteousness was demanded and maintained. Whether it is the priest, or the altar, or the sacrifice, all meet in Christ. The great point in connection with the altar is brought before us in Lev. vi. 13, "The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar ; it shall never go out." It was the place where the fire, the holy judgment of God, tested everything. The blood was sprinkled there, when a sinful man approached with his offering, in order to make atonement for him ; the priest alone could do this, and the *Son of God* alone could be the anti-type of the priest, and He alone could be the true altar. He was the only One in whom the question of good and evil could be righteously

settled. One who "loved righteousness and hated iniquity" could alone respond intrinsically to every demand of God's righteousness when tested by the holy judgment of God. The altar and the victim were in perfect accord. He died for the iniquity He hated, and He maintained the righteousness He loved, so that nothing went up to God but the sweet savour of devoted goodness, while the evil was atoned for, and of this the blood was the witness. The Son of God turned death into atonement, and in the perfection in which He offered Himself without spot to God, there was such a sweet savour that everyone who comes by the blood of Jesus has not only the forgiveness of sins, but is in all the acceptance of that sweet savour which was fragrant to the heart of God. I cannot find any good in myself, but in looking away to the Lord Jesus Christ, *there* I find all good. Again, if I were asked as to my salvation, and as to my assurance that all is clear with me before God, I should point to the Lord Jesus Christ in glory and say, That blessed Man has been accepted by God. He was once offered for sins, and has so glorified God about them in His death that God has glorified Him, and hence glory is the witness of a full and perfect acceptance for the one who comes to God by Him. Salvation is not something effected in

me ; no, it is in Him, as we read, " the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." The putting away of sin, the bearing iniquity, the glorifying God, all was done by Jesus. There was the perfection of good in Him, while in us there was only evil, and He is the accepted One in glory.

Death is not a pleasant thing to look at. No one with any sensibility would like to go and see a man executed. A brutal man perhaps might do it. Who would have wished to stand by the cross of Jesus ? We read of those who came together to that sight, that they smote their breasts and returned. There is nothing in death to attract us, it is repulsive to us. But Jesus died, and then a soldier pierced His side, and forthwith came out blood and water. We do not like to have to do with death in any way, but Jesus has turned it into the way of glorifying God, and by it has put away in atonement the sins of all who believe. Death, which is so repulsive to us, is now the means of our blessing, as it has been for God's glory. The Son of God alone could do that, and now instead of death being the witness of judgment, it is the witness of expiation and of forgiveness ; and the Son of God having brought it to pass, it is the further witness of God's love.

But there is more. The Son of God has made death the means of our cleansing. There is water as well as blood. "This is he that came by water and blood." The two are linked together now; "not by water only, but by *water and blood*." Water is universally used for cleansing, but John says "not by water only"; so the Apostle Paul says, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done." Supposing that a man could so obey the holy law of God, and leaving off all the bad works, do works of righteousness—suppose it were possible to leave off thinking evil and having wrong desires—What then? It would, so to speak, be only water; there would be no blood. Had it been possible that man could have been cleansed by water alone, that is, by obedience to the word of God as expressed in the law, the Son of God need not have died; but the water now is the water of death, and consequent on that there is the renewing of the Holy Ghost. By death the man that sinned is set aside, and a new man is brought in.

Let us look at the necessity of this. When a person sins, it is not merely that sin is evil, but no one ever sinned without its leaving a moral stain upon that one. All the sinful pleasures as well as lusts in which men indulge leave the stains of sin upon the soul. Suppose a man does

me an injury and I freely forgive him the wrong done to me ; that does not remove from him the moral stain of having done it, though the actual injury is forgiven. Others may hear of it, and say, You are the man that did such and such an action ; he may plead, But I am forgiven the wrong ; the one I have wronged will never say any more to me about it. Ah ! it might be replied, but how bad it was of you to do it ; what a bad man you must be. There is always a moral blot with sin. That is why the apostle says “ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ” ; but there is something more—“ *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* ” Man is unrighteous in sinning. Not only is the sin forgiven, but the unrighteousness is cleansed ; there is water as well as blood.

But I will put a stronger case. Suppose I had wilfully or by carelessness caused the death of a man, and in deep contrition of heart I approached his widow, and she said to me, You caused the death of my husband ; it is a terrible thing to me, but I forgive you. Even the king might intervene with a pardon if I were convicted, but though forgiven, could I undo the wrong ? Should I not carry with me to my dying day the sense of the terrible thing I was capable of doing, and which I did ? Can I get rid of that ? It is

not the question of relief from judgment or of the pardon of guilt, but of a moral stain upon me. What will cleanse it ? Only one thing can do away with the stain, Death. If the one whose death I had caused were a Christian, and I also know the value of the precious blood of Christ, I might feel, We shall meet in heaven. We shall meet there in life and righteousness, and all the past will have been left behind in death. All is holy and happy there.

Now it is not by our own death, but cleansing as well as expiation is by the death of Jesus. Not only can God righteously forgive sins, but the believer is permitted to reckon according to what took place in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I died to sin in His death, that I might live to God in His life, and no longer in the life of the man who caused the death of another. I am permitted to reckon that life gone in that He died—a life stained and blotted. How much evil the heart of man knows ! How many could say, Would to God I had never known such and such evil, or done such and such a thing. How can it be effaced ? Jesus is the answer.

Jesus died, and we died with Him,
Buried in the grave He lay,
Now with Him in resurrection,
We have part in heaven's bright day.

The water as well as the blood flowed from the side of Jesus ; the water and blood cannot be

dissociated. The death of Christ is the means of moral cleansing for the soul. The life to which sin attached has gone, in that He died and was buried, and I, as a believer, may reckon myself to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do you so reckon? Do you know the value of the water as well as of the blood which came from the side of Jesus? He died the just for the unjust that we might be righteously forgiven, but there was more than that; He gave up that life in which *as a Man* He lived down here, a holy, sinless life. That life of man in us is sinful, but in His giving up His life He brought to an end before God that sinful life in us, and we reckon that we have died in His death, and that now we live in Him who has left all our sinful condition behind in death that we might live in His life.

In the passage I read from Titus the apostle first speaks of what we were. "We ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." What a catalogue of moral stains! We may not have been stained by all these things, but anyhow we have been "foolish and disobedient." But after all that, "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared." God looked

down upon man and saw all these moral blots. Oh ! what a stained as well as sinful life is the life of man. *We* see a great deal when we look below the surface of outward appearance, but *God* sees all. But God's Son came into the world, a blessed Man in whom the kindness and love of God to man appeared. The angels said when He was born, " Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good pleasure in man." There was nothing but glory to God in Him. What a contrast to Titus iii. 3. In Him also the graciousness and love of God to man appeared. Men were hateful and hating one another ; strife was there ; but He came with peace for the earth. There was no peace amongst men, and the Lord Jesus experienced the hatred of man's heart ; they turned away from Him, refused the message of peace, and crucified Him ; but in Him there was the love of God to man, and it was proved in death.

" Not by works of righteousness which *we* have done " ; and yet there are many who think that turning over a new leaf and doing works of righteousness will ensure them salvation. Were it even possible, it could not bring them, as the prodigal was brought, into the joy of the father's house in perfect suitability. Suppose the prodigal had been content to turn over a new leaf in the

far country, he would still have been away from his father, still in the place of his sin and shame, without the kiss of forgiveness and love, and without the suitability for the joy of his father's house. When the prodigal arose and came to his father he left the life of sin and shame behind in the far country. This answers to the washing of regeneration. The Israelites left Egypt and its shame behind them by passing through the Red Sea ; we are free by the death of Christ being applied to us by the word, and administratively by baptism. The best robe was no part of the old inheritance, and answers to the *renewing* of the Holy Ghost. This connects us with heaven and eternal life.

I would refer again to the order of the tabernacle. There was the brazen altar where, as we have seen, the blood was sprinkled, this speaks of our justification by His grace ; then there was the brazen laver where the water was, this speaks of the washing of regeneration. Why is it called the washing of *regeneration* ? Regeneration means a new order of things in which to live, hence the millennial state is called "the regeneration" (Matt. xix. 28) ; it will be introduced on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ. But already we can reckon according to those great facts, that like as Christ was raised

from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we should walk in newness of life. We reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. So in verse 1 of this epistle we have “the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness”; and I connect this with the washing of regeneration, while the hope of eternal life is connected in chap. iii. 7 with the renewing of the Holy Ghost. This washing is through the death of Jesus; the altar and the laver are both connected with the life upon earth of those brought to God by that death; both stood in the *court* of the tabernacle. It is a great thing to see the old life of sin and shame left behind in the death of Christ. It was so for the dying thief, though he had not to reckon as one still down here, he actually left it all behind for Paradise.

It is thus that God saves us, delivering us from the old state practically, by bringing home to us through His precious word the truth connected with the death of Jesus; but there is another thing—through death the Son of God has taken a place for us beyond death in resurrection life and glory, and of this the Spirit is the witness—the witness to us of what? That in Him who is beyond death there is eternal life for the believer. This is more than being in the favour of God down

here. In Titus we read of “the *renewing* of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” Eternal life is not the life of man down here: it belongs to heaven, though it was down here manifested in the Son. When He was here the life was here; now that He is in heaven the life is there, and the Spirit has come from heaven as the witness of what we have in Him up there. This carries us in hope outside of earth and of the life of flesh upon earth, so that it is more than walking in newness of life upon earth; the Holy Ghost has been shed on us *abundantly* (because He is the witness of abounding life in Him who laid down His life for us and rose again), in order that, being justified by *His* grace, we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

The imperishable word of God brings to our souls the value of the water and the blood—the death of the Son of God, and the Spirit given to us is the witness that the Adam life is set aside, and that life is in the Son of God, and by the Spirit all becomes a reality to us. If the Spirit fills our hearts, then Christ fills them, for the Spirit is the witness of Christ, and thus Christ known in heaven becomes intimately bound up with our renewed thoughts and desires. Most people understand what is meant by a kindred

spirit. It means that those who are of it think alike, their hearts run in the same direction, and they walk together. Now we read, "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," and this is by the Holy Ghost, and the effect of it is that Christ dwells in the heart by faith. He becomes everything, and we know our own nothingness, but have the hope of eternal life—a life beyond death. How many have looked beyond Jordan and said, Oh! what a life is there! Jesus is there, He is beyond death. Oh! that one name—Jesus! How everything for our souls is linked with Him, and He has taken that place through death, and we have the witness by the Spirit of abundant life in Him.

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