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ATONEMENT

Sacrificial Offering for Human Nature

Under the above title, the “Christadelphian Tidings” for March, included the following article concerning the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, a matter which has been under discussion in North America. It is important to understand the principles involved, and we believe the article will be of interest to readers of Logos. *It is reproduced hereunder.*

IN considering the important principles of atonement, there are two key points which must be considered:

[1] *Sacrifice is for our benefit, not God’s.* Slain animals were of no use to Him. If the offerer learned lessons from his sacrifice and applied the lessons in his daily life, then God was glorified. Animal sacrifices were thus intended for man’s instruction.

The same is true of the sacrifice of Christ. God “gave” His only begotten Son; Jesus Christ is a gift from God not a gift to God. Again, the objective is not our paying off spiritual debts we owe God; the objective is our instruction. In coming to Christ, we are able to acknowledge right principles which we should absorb into our hearts and implement in our daily lives.

[2] *Sacrifice is offered for non-transgression situations.* A notable example is that of childbirth. Upon the completion of her days of separation following the birth of her child, a woman was to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering to the priest. He would “offer it before Yahweh, and make an atonement for her” (Lev. 12:6-7).

Here was a time of great joy in a wonderful blessing from God. No transgression had been committed in giving birth. The order of offerings (first “burnt,” then “sin”) underscores this point as it is reversed from that which was offered when committed

sin is involved (cp. Lev. 5:9-10, first “sin,” then “burnt”). There was no moral uncleanness, yet atonement was provided. Why? What was the point?

Why Atonement for Childbirth?

There are certain facts which are evident and show the instructional potential of these offerings.

If he survived, a long road lay ahead for this newborn. If he was to become a godly seed, it would follow much dedication on his part and on the part of his parents. The parents should be keenly aware of this fact and should continually be concerned with educating the child in spiritual things. The burnt offering would speak to them of such dedication.

Complicating the dedication was the nature of the infant. He was prone to sin at the very core of his being for “from within, out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts” (Mk. 7:21—23). All his life, this new person would have to struggle against sin that was very near to him. He needed help; he needed God. A sin offering would bring these matters clearly to mind. In the midst of the joy of new birth, sobering reflections about human nature needed to take place.

Principles Acknowledged

When offerers willingly and perceptively participated in this ritual, they acknowledged several important principles.

- *God’s authority over their lives,* witnessed by their assent to the proce-

dure He had prescribed.

- *The need for dedication of the whole life of parent and child*, symbolised in the burnt offering.

- *The dangerous sin-tendency lurking in our nature*, acknowledged in the sin offering.

- *The need for God to provide the way of reconciliation*, acknowledged in seeking atonement.

Here were offerings teaching lessons about human nature, as distinct from actual transgression.

Offering for Human Nature

Instruction, not reparation, is the key to seeing the point. An *“offering for sin”* was not a reparation to God for sins committed. It was a teaching mechanism to instruct and motivate the Israelite who had sinned.

In like manner, offerings associated with childbirth were for the purpose of instruction rather than to satisfy some divine legalism; they were to teach the offerer vital lessons about human nature. They were thus *sacrificial offerings for human nature*.

No Inherited Guilt

Offerings for human nature do not indicate we inherit some guilt for Adam’s sin. Whilst we inherit consequences from Adam’s sin, we have no moral responsibility for his action and bear no guilt for it.

Most readers have doubtless noticed a marginal reading for Romans 5:12 (AV) that would indicate all the human race sinned in Adam. *“As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (‘in whom all have sinned’ mg.)”* The reading “in whom” is also found in the *Emphatic Diaglott*.

There is no basis for the rendering “in whom.” The Greek text does not allow for it. Not being a Greek expert, however, we consulted fifteen other versions for the phrase translated “for that all have sinned.” Here are their renderings: “because all sinned” (RSV, NIV, NASB, AMPLIFIED); “for that all sinned” (RV, YOUNGS LIT., ROTHERHAM); “inasmuch as all men have sinned” (MOFFAT, NEB, MARSHALL INTERLINEAR); “because everyone has sinned” GOOD NEWS BIBLE, JERUSALEM BIBLE); “on which all sinned” (CONCORDANT LIT.); “since they all sinned” (A. WAY), “no one was himself free from sin” (J.B .PHILIPPS).

None have Right to Complain

There is a reason for this phrase in the text; it addresses the obvious question that arises in the reader’s mind: “Is God fair?” The answer is: “Yes, all have proven themselves worthy of death by personally committing sin.” That point was established earlier in the epistle (Rom. 3:9-19) and only needs an allusion here. In fact, Rom. 5:14 should settle the matter as it specifically notes that death reigns over everyone, even though they are not guilty of the sin of Adam.

For more thorough treatment of the matter, we need to consider two passages that can seem to support the logic of our being held in some way guilty for Adam’s sin.

Levi and Abraham

“And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes (to Melchizedek) in Abraham. For he was

yet in the loins of his father, when Melchizedek met him” (Heb. 7:9-10, alluding to the incident recorded in Gen. 14:18-20). Does this provide a precedent for attributing the moral actions of one person to his progeny?

No it does not.

In the first place, Abraham’s action was not a matter of sin or righteousness. It was a matter of deference to position. This is the issue stressed in Hebrews: “See how *great* he (Melchizedek) is! Abraham the patriarch gave him a title of the spoils... (Melchizedek) blessed him who had the promises (Abraham). It is beyond dispute that the *inferior* (Abraham) is blessed by the *superior* (Melchizedek)” (Heb. 7:4-7).

Levi had a position before God because of the promises to Abraham. By himself, Levi was a person of no special standing. If the one to whom the promises were made was inferior in status to Melchizedek, surely one of his progeny, who depended for position solely on descent from Abraham, was inferior. The Levi example thus has nothing to do with the attribution of a person’s moral conduct to his progeny.

Second, Abraham’s moral conduct is not attributed to his offspring. Ishmael and Isaac, for example, are not considered faithful just because they are his descendants. In fact, there is no scriptural precedent for one person’s sins being attributed to another.

The Sin of Achan

Achan sinned against the Lord in taking spoil from Jericho (Jos. 7:20). In exposing one person’s sin, God speaks as if all Israel had done the deed: “Israel hath sinned... they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff” (7:11). The sin of the individual is attributed to the group. Does this incident justify attributing

Adam’s sin to the whole human race?

No, it does not.

If the nation of Israel had the right attitude, they could have prevented Achan’s sin by diligent vigilance. They had been given special warning that if anyone took of the accursed things, the whole nation would suffer: “And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto Yahweh: they shall come into the treasury of Yahweh” (Jos. 6:18—19). With such a warning, they should all have been watching each other. If they had, Achan’s sin might have been prevented.

There is clearly no parallel to our situation with respect to Adam. We had no opportunity to prevent what he did. Accordingly, the Achan incident does not establish a principle that would justify the idea of our being considered guilty of Adam’s sin.

Consequences, But Not guilt

There is much evidence that we are benefited or harmed by what others do. All Noah’s family was saved from the flood because he walked with God. David’s progeny were benefited by his righteousness, and the nation had punishment deferred for David’s sake.

In the course of daily life, one person’s virtue or evil can affect many in his family or community. This is not the same, however, as attributing the guilt of one person’s actions to others.

We may share the consequences of Adam’s sin but we do not share guilt for it. Furthermore, acknowledging that sacrificial offerings are made for human nature does not intimate we are in any way guilty of Adam’s sin.

—Don Styles.