Exodus - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Short Meditations, Atonement-Money, The

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THE simpler our apprehension of "atonement," or " reconciliation " (the same thing), the happier. It implies a change of condition towards God. Instead of being at a distance from Him, we are brought nigh-instead of being in a state of enmity, we are at peace with Him. Such is our condition. Whatever experience we may have of it, our condition is that of peace with God, when we have received the atonement which has been accomplished by the blood of the cross.

But this reconciliation, this condition of peace with God, rests on the fact, that God finds His satisfaction in what Christ has done on the cross for us. My peace with God depends on His satisfaction in Christ. If God did not rest in Him and His work for me, I could not rest in God. If God's demand, in righteousness, against me, had not been answered, I could have had no warrant for talking of reconciliation, or taking my place in peace before God. I was God's debtor-debtor to die under the penalty He had righteously put upon sin. Christ acted as my Surety with Him. He undertook my cause as a sinner. If God had not been satisfied as to my responsibilities to Him, I should still be at a distance from Him, He would still have a question with me, a demand upon me and against me.

Therefore I ask, Has God been satisfied with what Christ has done for me? I answer, He has, for He has let me know this by the most wondrous, glorious, magnificent testimonies that can be conceived. He has published His satisfaction in the cross of Christ, in Christ as the Purger of sins, by the mouth of the most unimpeachable witnesses that were ever heard in a court where justice or righteousness presided to try a matter. He tells me that all His demands against me as a sinner, are fully, righteously discharged.

The rent veil declares it. The empty sepulcher declares it. The ascension of Christ declares it. The presence of the Holy Ghost here (gift as He is, and fruit, of the glorification of our Surety) declares it.

Were ever such august testimonies delivered on the debating of a cause? Were witnesses of higher dignity, of such unchallengeable credit, ever brought forward to give in their depositions? Were depositions ever rendered in such convincing style?

The sequel is well weighed. Peace with God is our condition, a condition settled by God Himself. For we plead the cross of Christ as our title to peace, God Himself having declared that He and all His demands against us are satisfied in and by that cross. God rests in Christ, and so do we.

My experience may be cold and feeble. It is so surely. It may be blotted by doubts and fears, and other affections, of which I ought to be ashamed. But my condition is sure and strong -just as the throne of God itself. The Purger of sins has been raised from the dead by which He answered for sins, and has been taken up to that throne as such Purger, and if He can be moved, so must the throne where He sits. If He be disallowed there, the word and call and voice of God that summoned and seated Him there, must be gainsaid and disallowed also. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God," is to be read as setting, out our condition, rather than our experience. By faith in the death and resurrection of the Lamb of God, we are justified, are in a state of acceptance with Him, standing in divine righteousness, or " as the righteousness of God." This is our state, our condition before Him, our relationship to Him. Our experience may not measure it-but such it is; though surely our experience should be as our condition.

But let me look a little particularly at Ex. 30.

This ordinance of the atonement-money tells us, that God appropriates His elect to Himself, only as a ransomed people. And surely we know that to be so. If we be not ransomed, we are not His. If we are not in the value of the blood of Christ, we are not numbered to Him as of the lot of His inheritance, or as belonging to Him.

Before the institution of this ordinance, this had been a recognized truth. It was the firstborn, whether of man or of beast, that was His, in the]and of Egypt, because it was the firstborn who had been ransomed. (Ex. 12; 13) And after this time, in the day of the New Testament, we learn the same. The Lord Jesus says to Peter, " If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." (John 13) And surely, again I may say, we know that this is so; only we have it here, among a thousand others, in the mouth of these three witnesses; by the testimony of the Passover, by the testimony of this ordinance of the atonement-money, and of the word of his Lord in John 13.

But this ordinance not only tells us, that we are thus to find ourselves among the people of God, by being a ransomed people-a people who make mention before Him of the blood of Christ, and of that only, bringing with them into His presence the atonement-money, and that only-but it also tells us, that He Himself has fixed and settled what that ransom or atonement-money shall be.

This is full of consolation, when we think of it. We learn all about the way of coming to God from Himself We have not to reason about it, but to accept His account of the matter in all its characters. Every Israelite had to present himself to God with his half-shekel, which was called " the atonement-money." Whether he were rich or poor, made no difference. He had not to measure his offering himself, the Lord had prescribed and settled what it was to be. And each and all appeared together in virtue of one and the same ransom.

So that we gather these conclusions, in all clearness and decision and simplicity. It is the divine good-pleasure, and the sure revelation of God, that God was to have His people with Him and before Him only as a ransomed people-the price and quality and measure of the ransom being settled entirely by Himself, so that they have not to object or to question, be they who they may, rich or poor; and that, in this way, all His people are not only thus reconciled and brought home to Him, but linked in one and the same salvation, and animated by one and the same spring of triumph and exultation.

The conscience of a sinner, instructed by scripture, may therefore indulge itself in these thoughts and assurances. The true half-shekel, the real atonement-money, and that is " the blood of the Lamb," is the consideration, the full, adequate, settled consideration, on which the covenant of peace rests. It is a righteous ransom. God is just while He justifies the sinner who trusts in it. The Lord Himself says of it, " This is the new covenant in my blood." It is called " the blood of the everlasting covenant," and it is preached to us that by virtue of it, God, as " the God of peace," has " brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep," a Savior-Shepherd for sinners. (Heb. 13:20.)

And I might add to this, and to what I have already said, that the adequacy of this mystic half-shekel, this precious blood of atonement, is finely set forth in contrast with the insufficiency of all other sacrifices, in Heb. 10:1-18.

The insufficiency of all the Levitical offerings, is there concluded from the testimony which they bare themselves. Out of their own mouth they are judged-and no judgment can be of a, higher quality than that. Thus, the fact that he who made those offerings, the priest in the Levitical sanctuary, only stood before God, having to go out again from the divine presence, in order to repeat the same sacrifice at the appointed time. The fact that such repetition was made year by year, thus keeping sin, and not the remission of it, in remembrance. The solemn recognition of the insufficiency of those sacrifices or offerings, by Christ Himself, when, in the volume of the book, He comes to present Himself as ready in the cause of sinners, to do God's will. And then, the impossibility of the thing itself, that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin.

In contrast with this, we get the adequacy of the blood of Christ strikingly testified and concluded. The fact that He is seated in the heavenly sanctuary, as having satisfied God by the sacrifice He has offered, and accordingly greeted and welcomed, and made to take His place forever before God as the Purger of sins. The fact also, that He is now occupied with thoughts and expectations of His coming kingdom, needing no more to think about sin and the atonement for it, as He did, in the volume of the book, or in the day of settling the terms of the everlasting covenant. And the further fact, that the Holy Ghost, in the new covenant which is sealed by the blood of Christ, tells of remission of sin; not as did the Levitical priests over the sacrifices they offered, of the remembrance of it.

This is all encouraging and assuring. But I must add another thing. The adequacy of the true half-shekel, the true atonement-money, is not to be rested simply on the fact of its being appointed by God, but on its own nature. It is appointed of God, because of its nature, because of its intrinsic adequacy. It is a half-shekel " of the sanctuary," having been weighed in the balances of the holy of holies, and found of full value before the throne of God. We are not to say, the blood of the Lamb is the appointed ways as though God might have chosen or taken some other. We are rather to say, it is the only way, for in that sacrifice, but in that only, God is just, and the Justifier of sinners. It is the price, the only price, which measures the debt, which satisfies the balances of the sanctuary, and which gives the sinner an answer to the throne of righteousness. Blessed mystery!-it does all this. So that the apostle loses himself in admiration, as he gazes at this great sight, as he meditates on that sacrifice which had the virtue of " spotlessness," and of " the eternal Spirit," in it. We see him treating with some scorn and indignity the thought of the blood of bulls and goats; saying, "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." But with fervency of spirit, as one that was losing himself in wonder, love, and praise, looking at the cross of Christ, he says, " How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Heb. 9:14; 10:4.)

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THE bitter waters of Marah must be tasted when the salt waters of the Red Sea have delivered us from Egypt forever and ever. Put the wood of the tree, the cross of Christ, into our cross and all will be sweet. "Crucified" is terrible work-crucified with Christ, joy and deliverance; reproach is cruel, the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

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