

**LECTURES ON THE DAY OF
ATONEMENT, LEVITICUS XVI.
WITH AN APPENDIX ON THE
CHIEF ERRORS RECENTLY
CURRENT ON ATONEMENT**

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Lectures on the Day of Atonement, Leviticus XVI. With an Appendix on the Chief Errors
Recently Current on Atonement by W. Kelly

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BY
W. KELLY.

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1889.

THE
DAY OF ATONEMENT.

LECTURE I.

LEVITICUS xvi. 1-4.

Its General Principle compared with Christ's Work.

I wish to present the principle of atonement, and have, therefore, taken the preliminary verses of Lev. xvi., which introduce the Day of Atonement. It is only an introduction to the subject; but in the course of these discourses, proofs will appear from this type that God not only had all before His mind (as every one that knows Him must feel) but has been pleased to unroll it before us. In the most marvellous manner He contrived, with a wisdom that bespeaks itself divine, to furnish an earthly people with ceremonies which insisted on provisional sacrifices, and cleansing for the defilements of their outward conduct (or what is called "the purifying of the flesh"). But in these self-same rites grace and truth lay hidden till the light of Christ should shine on them and reveal, if not the very image, the shadows of good things to come; some already fulfilled, some not even yet but no less assuredly to be, according to the word and purpose of God.

Inasmuch, then, as even this chapter can generally testify, God has plans which have not yet been

carried out to the full, we may see what is true of Scripture, that it is prophetic. And is there anything that brings out God more than the fact that His word is prophetic? Prophecy is a more enduring and deeper witness than miracle. A sign or a miracle no doubt is a display, while the world goes on as usual, of God's active power; but prophecy gives living proof of His mind. None but a low-minded or thoughtless man could suppose that power is equal to mind. And there is more than mind in it: moral light is conveyed, the maintenance, as well as the making known, of God's character and will, which is evidently far beyond not matter only but mind. As the greatest of Frenchmen said, the least mind is superior to all matter, whilst all mind is below charity or divine love.

Here we find the true source of atonement: the love of God provided it in a way that should conciliate grace and righteousness, guilty man and a holy God Who thus, and thus only, causes mercy to glory against judgment. No where is God so highly exalted, nowhere man so truly humbled. What speaks so profoundly of sin as the blood of Christ? But it is applied to our utter unworthiness, it is brought in for the very purpose of meeting man as he is, and of bringing him out of all his iniquities to God as God is. For such, and nothing less, is the design of atonement. Divine righteousness, based on Christ's work, is its character, when man was proved unrighteous; and as it was according to grace, so is it of faith, and thus open to every believer.

But the Day of Atonement necessarily had a temporal and imperfect character; "the law made nothing perfect." It was, beyond question, the most solemn act in the whole Jewish year; but the fact of its renewal every year was conclusive evidence, as the Epistle to the Hebrews declares, of its inefficacy for conscience as well as for God in view of eternity. It was therefore provisional, as all the institutions of the law were. Is this any impeachment of God's law? It is His own word that pronounces it. If so, you will allow God to be a better judge than you are, or I, or all men. If God declares that the law made nothing perfect—and such is His expressed and irrevocable sentence (Heb. vii. 19)—who with the least reverence for God can question it for a moment? Therefore the provisional atonement year by year for Israel on its face had what did not rise up to the perfection of God's nature, character, and mind. At best it could be but a shadow of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ.

One can understand readily that, only when a perfect being comes, can the result be in perfection. Adam was an admirable creature no doubt, if we believe the scriptures, as an innocent man on an unfallen earth. Nevertheless, on the plain surface of facts, the first thing recorded of him when tried is that he sins. There must be perpetual and violent effort to escape the moral inference; honest denial of man's sin there cannot be. The overwhelming fact is out from the beginning. Is it to be tolerated or ignored because it is universal?

At once God brings in the token of a bruised Bruiser of the serpent, the woman's Seed. This ere long decided the difference between the two sons of Adam. "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offering." Why to Abel rather than to Cain? Because "by faith" Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice. Faith submits to, and receives, and rests on, the word of God. It was not the mere matter of fact or feeling; nor did it turn on which of the two brought the largest or more valuable offering. "By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." What made it so? In Cain there was no more than natural religion, as he took no account of sin; he offered in duty to Jehovah of the fruit of the ground—the ground under the curse. It was the expression of unbelieving homage, with total insensibility to sin on one side and to grace on the other. Faith always confesses sin in man, as it more or less counts on grace in God. Whatever be the sin of man, the grace of God is beyond it. One of the workings of unbelief is despair, another the bolder form of rebellion against God in the open rejection of His word. But the soul may not be so impious and yet be as really guilty by doubting grace in God to forgive its sin, however heinous. Faith, seeing Christ and hearing the Gospel, owns the sin truly, but reckons on the mercy God reveals.

Man's device ever fails to cover his evil. God clothed guilty Adam and Eve with coats of skins. It was a provision which, in presence of sin, spoke of death, yet of mercy to man through death. This,

without God's word, would never have entered the human mind. Naturally, for that matter, Cain's was a much more reasonable offering in appearance. For what man, as man is, however intelligent, would have thought of a sacrifice as acceptable to God? It was exactly what Abel brought "of the firstlings of the flock, and the fat thereof." If slain beasts furnished the clothing which God gave his parents, Abel slays a lamb in sacrifice to God. It was an offering in faith; access to God for a sinner can only be through death. That behind it all there was more and what was deeper than Abel or any saint of old knew, is true. One does not say that Abel contemplated the sacrifice of the woman's Seed; but it was in God's mind, and faith reaped the blessing. Therefore Abel was attested as righteous, "God bearing witness to his gifts, and by it, being dead, he yet speaketh." Abel looked for the One Who should crush the power of evil here below; and against and above nature he, by faith, offered sacrifice to God with the expression of its excellency in "the fat." But God blesses according to what He sees in the sacrifice: a principle which plainly came out later in the blood of the paschal lamb (Exod. xii. 13).

No doubt all the believers throughout the Old Testament looked for the Kinsman-Redeemer, as we may see in the assurance of Job (xix. 25, 26), the destroyer of death and of him that has the power of death. They did not question that in due time the Messiah would meet both God and man perfectly;

but to suppose that they understood how it was to be done is going beyond scripture. Not even the disciples in the days of our Lord could have put the two things intelligently together. Did not Christ's personal envoys, who accompanied the Master from John's baptism till the ascension — did not the apostles know as much as their predecessors? To doubt this would be doing anything but honour to the teaching of Jehovah's righteous Servant (Isa. liii. 11). His enemies being judges, "never man spake like this man"; and never did men on earth receive such a course of holy and perfect instruction as the twelve from the Son of God.

The grand question then is, not what the saints under the Old Testament understood, but what God set up and what its bearing is on the atonement, now that Christ has come and finished the work given Him to do. The true meaning of the atonement is in question, and here the New Testament alone comes conclusively to our aid. What can be conceived clearer than the divine comment given in the Epistle to the Hebrews (or Christian Jews), who needed it, as they ought to have appreciated it best? We sometimes hear of commentaries and commentators, and the best men shew both prepossessions and prejudices. It is a pity that they do not use the Epistle to the Hebrews a little more and to better purpose. *There* is the greatest of all commentaries, and the one most immediately bearing on this very truth with which we are now occupied. Not only does the inspired text lie in the chapter