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LITERATURE.

PURGE YOUR CONSCIENCES.

A SERMON BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

ST. PAUL'S CONTRAST OF HEBRAIC AND CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE—ESSENTIALS OF AN ACCEPTABLE OFFERING—EXTENT AND EFFICIENCY OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT—THE CHRISTIAN'S FULL DUTY.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; 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?"—HEBREWS ix. 13, 14.

Some of you may remember that six years ago I preached from this text, principally dwelling upon the type of the red heifer. We then tried to show how in these ashes of the heifer, laid by in store and applied to the unclean with water, God gave to His people in the wilderness a purification of the flesh whenever they had defiled themselves by touching any dead thing. This was the great instrument by which they were delivered from a ceremonial quarantine under which they were kept apart till they had been purified. I am not going to enlarge upon that type to day. I felt when preaching upon it that I had not reserved due space for the latter and more important part of the text: it is my purpose to make amends this morning.

THE CHIEF END OF MAN'S CREATION.

To serve the living God is necessary to the happiness of a living man; for this end were we made, and we miss the design of our making if we do not honor our Maker. Many ways have been tried by men to make themselves perfectly content, but they cannot find satisfaction out of God. When a man getteth to serve God, and in proportion as he thoroughly does so, he is peaceful, restful, and happy. Man is a fallen star till he is right with heaven; he is out of order with himself and all around him till he occupies his true place in relation to God.

God's idea of what a nation should be was set forth in the camp in the wilderness. If God's command had been fully carried out, the desert would have exhibited a scene of highest blessedness. We should have seen a holy people surrounding the central abode of the Holy God; a people whose ordinary, everyday life was sanctified by the presence of God; a people whose shadow by day was God in the pillar of fire; a people to whom God was leader, or whom God was the vanguard, and for whom God brought up the rear; a people who lived upon the bread of p

heaven; a people who drank of water which leaped by divine power from the rock; a people having God to be their glory and their defence. Alas! they were always seeking to be as the evil nations around them; they could not rest till they had descended to the level of the common mass of mankind; but if they could have risen to God's intent, so that the divine purpose of love had been fully carried out in them, they would have been the happiest of all the sons of men.

We ourselves, as a church, if we can fulfil the type, if we live with God in the midst of us, if He is our dwelling-place throughout all generations, if we fetch our supplies from Him, if we move only at His bidding, if we intensely love Him—we shall be a people to be envied by all who know us. But, alas! a great difficulty comes in the way; and of that I am going to speak this morning, in order to the removal of it.

THE 'SAD HINDRANCE.'

First, then, let us briefly consider the sad hindrance which lies in the way of the service of God. In the camp in the wilderness the law was that if a man touched a dead body he was made unclean by touch; nay, if he only trod upon a dead bone in his daily walks, he was polluted by his accidental contact with death. If any person died in the tent, all the family and the tent itself became at once defiled, and they must undergo purgation before the inhabitants could mingle with the rest of the congregation, much less could go up to the holy place of assembly. My brethren, we are all under the ban by coming into contact with spiritual death. The apostle does not say, Purge your conscience from evil works, because he wanted to turn our minds to the type of defilement by death and therefore he said, dead works. I think he had a further motive; for he was not altogether indicating wilful transgressions of the law, but those acts which are faulty because they are not performed as the result of spiritual life. I see a difference between sinful works and dead works which we may perhaps be able to bring into light as we go on.

Upon our consciences there rests, first of all, a sense of past sin. Even if a man wishes to serve God, yet until his conscience is purged he feels a dread and terror of God which prevent his doing so. He had sinned, and God is just, and therefore he is at ease. The law is not to be trifled with; it is sent into the world armed with terrible sanctions, and the conscience when awakened makes us know that we cannot sin with impunity. It is impossible for any man rightly to serve God with a living, loving worship while he is conscious of guilt. Hence, brethren, we need the atoning sacrifice of Christ to purge the conscience; for the Lord will not be served by convicted criminals, neither can condemned rebels wish to serve Him.

On the back of this comes the consciousness that we ourselves are sinful and inclined to evil. Men who know that they are forgiven, yet nevertheless are seized with trembling in the presence of the divine purity. They cry, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips." We feel that we have not that perfect purity of heart and cleanness of hands which would fit us for the holy place; nor can we ever be saved from this fear, so as to take up our heavenly priesthood and serve God, till the precious blood of Christ shall be applied to the conscience, nor until we feel that in Christ we are accounted righteous. Happy are we if we are believers in Jesus; for he hath washed us and we are clean every whit.

But, besides this consciousness of sin and sinfulness, we are conscious of a measure of deficient life. About us there is a body of death. Dead works are the things we most require to be purged from. Dead works need not be in themselves works of wilful sin.

Do you not think that very much of common Christian conversation is dead, or very near to it? Ye stand and sing, but your hearts do not sing; ye bow your heads in prayer, but you are not praying; ye read the Scripture, but it is inspired to you, so as to breathe its own life into you. Beloved friends, we want the precious blood of Christ to purge our consciences from this death and its working, and to lift us into holy and heavenly life. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. God accepteth not the death sacrifice, but the living sacrifice. We must present a living sacrifice to the living God, or we cannot hope to be accepted; and for this reason we greatly need the blood of Christ to purge our consciences from dead works.

Once more: I told you that the Israelites were defiled by even touching a dead bone, and this teaches us the easiness of being polluted. We have to come into contact with evil in our daily dealings with ungodly men. Can we think of them, can we speak to them, can we trade with them, without incurring defilement? Can we walk through such a charnel house as this world without being defiled even unconsciously? If we have heard an evil thing, or read an evil thing, it has probably left some stain upon us, though we perceive it not. All the more surely it may be so because we do not see it; for that may but prove that the judgment has been depraved and the heart infected. The water of purification and the blood of atonement are needed day by day. Without these we cannot hope to minister before the Lord our God with acceptance.

THE TRUE PURIFICATION.

Now, I want to show what is the true purgation from this evil. Under the law there are several methods of purification. These things did purify the flesh, so that the man who had formerly contracted impurity might mix with his fellow-men in the congregation of the Lord. Now, if these matters were so effectual for the purifying of the flesh, well does the apostle ask, How much more shall the blood of Christ purge our conscience from dead works? Why does he ask, How much more?

First, because it is more truly purifying. There was not really and truly anything of purification about the blood of bulls and of goats might defile a person. Falling upon any man it bespattered his garments. Who cared to have a smear of blood upon his brow, or on his hands? It was not in itself a thing that could actually purify. All the prescribed purifications were types and shadows of the true propitiation for sin. Now, when the Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself our human nature, and lived a life of perfection, and then made an offering of himself in death, as the Just for the unjust; then there was a real sacrifice made unto the Most High God.

Moreover our Lord Christ offered a much greater sacrifice. Why doth the text here show the term *Christ*? One reason why the precious blood has such power to put away sin is because it is the blood of Christ, that is, of God's Anointed, God's Messiah, the Sent One of the Most High. Our Lord came not as an amateur, but came with a commission, he came with an appointed and unction from the Holy One:—hence there is a peculiar purifying power about all that He did, because He did it as Christ, the anointed of God.

Notice, it is not put concerning Christ that His life is purifying, though it had a wonderful relation thereto; nor is it said that His prayers are purifying, albeit everything is ascribable unto the intercession of our risen Lord; nor is it said that His resurrection is purifying; but the whole stress is laid upon the blood of Christ, signifying thereby death, death with pain, death as a victim, death with reference to sin. It is the blood of Christ that alone can make you fit to serve the living and true God.

Now what was it that Christ offered, and be sure that you lay great stress upon it! How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself? What a splendid word that is! Did He offer His blood? yes, but He offered Himself. Did He offer His life? yes, but He specially offered himself. Now, what is Christ? The anointed of God. In His wondrous complex nature He is God and man. He is prophet, priest, and king. He is—but time would fail me to tell you what He is; but whatever He is, He offered himself. The entire Christ was offered by Christ. He offered himself! You cannot put it to strongly by the use of any other word. The sacrificial act by which he presented himself was a faultless one, without spot. There was nothing in what Christ was himself and nothing in the way in which He offered himself, that could be objected to of God; it was without spot. Now you see, brethren, why it is that it has such purifying power for us.

Further, it is added that He did this by the eternal Spirit. This does not refer to the Holy Ghost; otherwise the apostle would have said by the Holy Spirit. It says, by the eternal Spirit; and the meaning is this, that His eternal Godhead gave to His offering of Himself an extreme value which otherwise could not have been attached to it.

Observe, then, the sacrifice was a spiritual one. You must never look at Christ's sacrifice in a carnal way, as though the mere drops of literal blood,

as a material substance could have virtue in them for the purging of sin.

But then you must not, forget that this spirit was divine—by the eternal Spirit, The spirit of Christ was an eternal spirit, for it was the Godhead. There was conjoined with His deity the natural life of a perfect man; but the eternal spirit was His highest self. His Godhead willed that He should die, and concurred in the death of the manhood, so that by the eternal spirit He offered Himself. The blood which he shed was the blood of God. Of course, blood as a physical thing, cannot be the blood of God; but viewing it as what it means—His sufferings His griefs His woes—these were consented by the divine spirit of Christ, and so by the eternal spirit He offered Himself to God. Because He is the Second Person of the adorable Trinity in unity, the suffering and death of His humanity had in them a potency of purgation by which he cleanses our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. What limit can you set to the merit of one who by the eternal spirit offered up himself? What bound can there be to a sacrifice divine? You can no more set a limit to our Lord's sacrifice than to Godhead itself. There is as much purging power in the death of our Lord to-day as in that hour when for the first time he appeared in the presence of God for us.

Need I call your attention to the fate that He offered himself *to God*? Yes I must; for of late some have blasphemously said that the sacrifice was made to the devil. To mention such profanity is to condemn it.

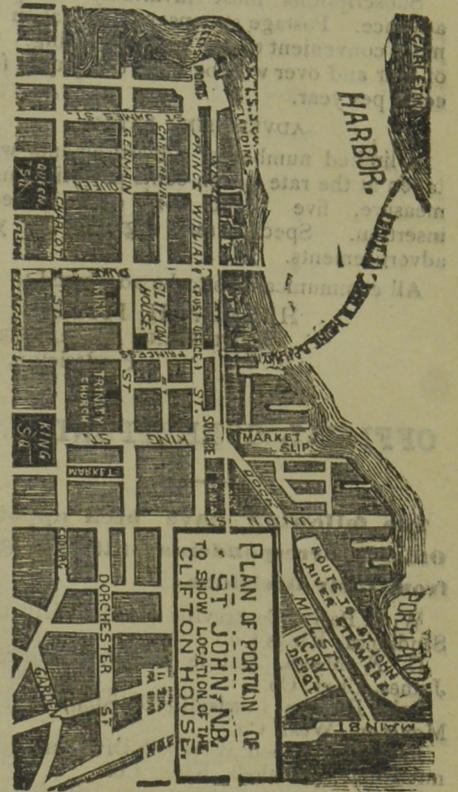
Once more upon this point: as I have shown you that the sacrifice of Christ was more real and greater, so I want you to notice that it was better applied: for the ashes of an heifer mixed with water were sprinkled on the bodies of the unclean; the blood of bulls and of goats was sprinkled upon the flesh, but neither of them could reach the heart. It is not possible for a material thing to touch that which is immaterial; but the sufferings of Christ, as I have explained them, offered up through his External Spirit, were not only of a corporeal but of a spiritual kind, and they reach, therefore, to the cleansing of our spirit.

That precious blood comes home to us in this way: first, we understand somewhat of it. The Israelite, when he was purged by the ashes of the red cow, could only say to himself, I am made clean by these ashes because God has appointed that I shall be, but I do not know why. But you and I can say that we are made clean through the blood of Christ, because there is in that blood an inherent efficacy; there is in the vicarious suffering of Christ on our behalf an inherent power to honor the law of God, and to put away sin. Because we can somewhat understand the cleansing given us in Christ, it has a greater power upon our conscience, and the better prepare us to serve God.

Then, again, we appreciate and approve of this way of cleansing. The Israelite could not tell why the ashes of a red heifer purified him: he did not object to it, but he could not express any great appreciation of the method. We, as we see our Lord suffering in our stead, fall at his feet in reverent wonder. Conscience finds rest and peace, and our whole conscience becomes that of a forgiven and accepted person, with whom God is well pleased. Our conscience, instead of condemning us, perceives the justice of the way by which we are absolved, and leads up our peace of heart into full assurance of faith. The blood of Christ has purified us to the centre, it has purged the core of the heart, it has cleansed our spirit, our mind, our memory, our thought, our intellect, our affections, and we are clean; and therefore are we meet to exercise a holy priesthood before the living God.

CONSCIENTIOUS CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

This brings me to my last head, which is this: consider the kind of service which he now render. After so much preparing, how shall we behave ourselves in the house of God? I am not speaking to you who have never been purged from dead works by the application of the precious blood of Christ; for you cannot serve God, you are forbidden to come into his presence, or to stand among his saints. You are in quarantine, even as lepers put forth from the camp. But to you who have had that blood applied to your conscience by the Spirit of God, even to you I speak. You should present unto the Lord the constant worship of living men. I believe there are thousands of men who could go to the stake and die, or lay their necks on the block to perish (Concluded on fourth page.)



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