

John 20:17 (Benjamin F. Pinkerton) 51447

Things New and Old: Volume 29, Word on the Atonement, A

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It has been denied emphatically that the whole work of atonement was accomplished in this world when Christ was on the cross, and affirmed that the propitiatory part of it yet remained for Him to make "in heaven and after death."

This seems to me to be a very serious statement to be allowed to pass unchallenged. It has been suggested that a few remarks having a formal reference to this novel position might be in place. My remarks shall be very few. None would have been needed had the author only given that as his own opinion or belief, for in that case the reader would have been apprised of its peculiarity, and would have considered it in that light. But he has written as though what he says is the orthodox view of the atonement, and this has unsettled some minds, and raised the question, "Was the whole work of atonement actually accomplished on the cross, or, did one essential part of it remain to be accomplished afterward and elsewhere?"

I remark (1.) The atonement is the sin-bearing work of Christ. It is perfectly unique in its nature; there was nothing like it before, nor could there be anything like it after. "Substitution" and "Propitiation" are terms used properly enough, to express two aspects of the same work. It was all accomplished at the same time, when God dealt with Christ on the cross, hiding His face from Him, and causing His wrath to press upon Him. To teach otherwise is to deny the unique nature of the atonement, and implies that substitution alone required suffering and wrath, and that propitiation was of a different nature altogether, and could be accomplished without suffering and wraith.

(2.) The doctrine on this grave subject under review is novel; it is neither the faith of evangelical Christians since the Reformation, nor is it according to scripture. But my present concern is only to point out, that the writer has put it forth as the received faith of all, and appears to regard as novel and false, the doctrine that the entire work of atonement was accomplished in this world when the Son of man was lifted up on the cross. He says of this doctrine, that if it be received, it would sweep away all hope of salvation. Hence, there is certainly a vital question at issue.

(3.) He has left the matter still in a measure of obscurity from his own point of view, for he has not told us plainly at what time and in what state our Lord accomplished the second essential part of atonement. A few years ago the thought was put forth poetically, that our ever adorable Lord went in spirit immediately after death, and appeared in a kind of official manner before the Father. But, so far as I now remember, the author of that thought attached no doctrine to it. Then again, in recent times, some took up John 20:17, and asserted that our Lord ascended privately on the morning of the resurrection, before He allowed any to come in personal contact with Him. But this was only an interpretation. I never heard any one affirm that it was to complete an essential part of atonement. As an interpretation one would not be troubled about it, even when not agreeing with it. But the writer has put forth new doctrine as to the atonement. He emphatically denies that it was finished on the cross, and affirms that one essential part was made in heaven, and after death; although he has not told us whether he connects this with an alleged private ascension, founded on John 20:17, or, with an official appearance before the throne, in the disembodied state, immediately after death. But I infer that he connects it with the latter.

Whichever of the two theories he may elect divides, in a purely mechanical way, the unique sin-bearing work of Christ, and I believe subverts it, and introduces a spurious atonement, neither Jewish nor Christian. He who adopts it must ignore the rending of the veil, and will soon find himself in an inextricable confusion as to what atonement really is.

It introduces confusion into the revealed relationships and mutual actions of the first and second Persons of the Trinity in the work of atonement. It was then, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was God in the majesty of His own nature dealing with Christ, who was then the holy, obedient and suffering Victim. But afterward it was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The very thought of Christ having anything further to do by way of making atonement is to me horrible beyond expression. He who knows what sin is, knows that it deserves wrath; and there was wrath when God dealt with Christ as to sin.

But I am only stating briefly the question at issue. I close by affirming that the doctrine put forth is not the received faith at all, and I believe it to be very false indeed, and if received would subvert the work on which our souls rest with divine certainty for eternity. Bold announcements of error require to be answered plainly.

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[In the Press, a Tract on this subject by the same writer. G. Morrish, London.]

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