

THE PERFECTION OF THE ATONEMENT¹

BRIEF OUTLINE OF A DISCOURSE ON

Preached on Sunday Evening, March 27th, 1842

By Mister JAMES WELLS

“For by one offering, he has perfected forever, them that are sanctified.” Hebrews
10:14

AFTER a few opening and introductory remarks, Mr. Wells proceeded to notice:

1. The principles upon which this great atonement was made. There were certain principles on which it was founded, which will be found to answer to the character of Him who atoned, as also to the necessities of the people for whom he suffered. These principles are gathered up together, and set before us by the Holy Ghost, in the 85th Psalm, where He says, “Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” These are the great principles on which this atonement was made, and God, in the working out His own eternal purpose, and in the salvation of His people, will never deviate from any one of them.

The first great principle on which this atonement is founded, is that of Mercy. The Lord appeared in this our world to bring about a revelation of the mercy of God towards his people. God the Father delights in mercy; and from that principle he will never deviate; wherefore it is said, “His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him.” The Holy Ghost delights in mercy; and therefore, where he has begun a good work, he will perfect it even unto the day of Jesus Christ. But we must not look at these principles abstractedly, but in connection, as the Holy Ghost has set them down. And we find not only Mercy, but

Secondly, Truth. God the Father has been pleased to reveal his sovereign supremacy over all things; nor He never has been, and He never will be, brought under subjection to the creature. He is the God of Truth, all He has ever done, has been done in truth; all He has promised, is upon the principle of Truth, and therefore, not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail.

Righteousness is another principle. If you look to what the Scriptures say of this atonement, you will find that our salvation is a matter of right. The Lord Jesus Christ, in this atonement, magnified the law, swallowed up all the church’s sins, and so fully satisfied all the demands of divine justice, as thereby to make the salvation of his church and people a matter of right. When we arise from the dead, when we enter the celestial kingdom, we shall do so as a matter of right, and therefore, the promise is “Christ SHALL see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied.”

¹ This is taken with minor revisions for modern English from “The Silent Preacher” ‘Christian Critic and Spiritual Wine Press’ Number 12 Volume 1 April 1842. Many thanks to Matthew for his generous scanning of this rare sermon.

Peace is another principle. See how beautifully they come in one after another. When, by the Holy Ghost, the people are brought to see and feel how the Lord has loved them, and redeemed them, and eternally secured unto them the salvation and glorification of their souls, O what peace do they enjoy! I do not wonder at the Old Testament saints dying so quietly. There is not much noise, or prayer-making, or talking about their dying. They had a secret satisfaction in, and a blessed peace with God, and therefore, they met the last enemy with calmness, and without fear. David had this secret satisfaction of peace with God in his soul, and therefore he said, "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; and this is all my salvation, and all my desire." Simeon felt this blessed peace in his soul, and he said "Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation," and he fell asleep. I do not wonder at the martyr Stephen, closing his eyes and falling asleep, even while they stoned him, for he had this peace.

Now, see how the atonement is based upon all these principles, and how they are connected with it. Take away the atonement of Christ, and we can have no mercy, no truth; no righteousness, no peace. And is anything needed from the creature to give strength, permanency, or majesty to this atonement? Will mortal worms dare contend that without something is done by them, this atonement will not be complete, or the salvation of the church secure? Oh no! "He HAS PERFECTED; He has perfected FOR EVER them that are sanctified." But respecting these principles, what are they? Who is Mercy? why Christ. What is Truth? why Christ. Who is Righteousness? why it is Christ. And what is this peace, but Christ? "He is our Peace." Here then, God rests in his Mercy; He rests in his Truth; He rests in his Righteousness: He rests in his peace, in his love, and in his power. And, blessed be God, we are brought to rest here too. Oh, you poor deluded free-willers, formalists, and mongrel Calvinists, you may go on with your schemes as far as you can; but you will never find mercy, you will never find Truth, nor Righteousness, nor Peace, nor Heaven, on any other principles. Electing Mercy, sovereign Truth, everlasting Righteousness, and a secret and eternal Peace are the only principles on which you can draw nigh unto God.

Having thus hastily glanced at the principles on which the atonement is founded, we come,

Secondly, to consider the necessity of it. And there are two circumstances, (many might be multiplied, but they will all be included in these two,) which rendered this atonement essentially necessary. 1. Our state as sinners; under which head, you must connect the twofold idea of our entire dependence upon God, and our solemn responsibility to him, He having a rightful claim to our obedience. Now, here you will have a positive proof of the eternal Godhead of Christ; for if He had been only a creature, he would have had quite as much as he could have done to have rendered obedience for himself: he would not have been at liberty to do anything, (much less to render a perfect obedience), for another. In order to a person's stepping forward, and becoming responsible for millions of souls, he must be one who is entirely independent, on whom no one has any claim or demand. Now the manhood of Christ being *dependent* on his Godhead, and his Godhead being *independent* of his manhood, made him an independent person. Hence the Apostle says, "He humbled himself," for no one could humble him. He wrought salvation, for no one could help him. With his own arm, in his own strength, and according to his own sovereign will. He obtained the victory. He was God and Man in one person; hence Zechariah cried out "Blessed be the LORD GOD (mark! the LORD GOD!) of Israel, who has visited and redeemed his people." He was the Lord God; and, therefore, though he went through all the vicissitudes and ordinary circumstances connected with this life, yet no disease could attack him, no snare could entangle

him; no power could resist him; so that when the astonished prophet exclaimed “WHO IS THIS that comes from Edom?” He did well and truly answer “It is I that speak in righteousness, MIGHTY TO SAVE!”

But I come to the second thing which rendered this atonement necessary; and that is, the holiness of God. To make a full and sufficient atonement, we must have one that is not only independent, but one that is capable of enduring and suffering the heavy wrath of an offended God one that can compass and carry away all the guilt and iniquity of the whole election of grace. And though no tongue can ever describe the sufferings of Christ, yet in that solemn Scripture, (the 22nd Psalm) you have the words of Christ himself (in prophecy) while enduring those sufferings. “My God”, says he, “My God! *why* have you forsaken me? why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” And this sorrowful interrogation He answers himself in the third verse “It is” says he, “Because you are HOLY! O, you that inhabit the praises of Israel.” You see then, God hates sin with such an eternal hatred, that rather than the objects of his choice, the objects of his dearest love, should come into his presence contrary to his holy and righteous will, He charges, causes to meet upon the head of his dearly beloved Son, all their sins, and inflicts upon Him all the punishment due to them.

But you must remember Deity itself could not suffer. Neither could the humanity of Christ endure this mighty load of suffering in its own strength. No but it was the humanity supported and strengthened by his eternal Godhead, that enabled him to obtain the victory, to bear away and make an end of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. Without this glorious atonement, we could never get away from sin, we could never get away from the world, we could never get away from the flesh we could never get access unto God; but when this atonement is brought into the conscience by the Holy Ghost, then we get away from these things altogether.

Christ did not come to *restore* us to the image of the first Adam; No; “we are predestinated to be conformed unto the image of God.” The image of the first Adam was a creature holiness, a creature wisdom, a creature love, and a creature dominion. But, this creature holiness, this creature wisdom, this creature love, and this creature dominion was all overcome and destroyed. In Christ, we have not a creature holiness, but the holiness of God, not a creature wisdom, but the wisdom of God, not a creature love, but the love of God, not a creature dominion, but the dominion of God: hence we may be said to live in the holiness of God, in the love of God, in the power and immutability of God. The creature image which we had in Adam, passed away, but the image which we have in Christ is eternal, and shall never pass away.

But we pass on to notice the benefits resulting from this atonement, and they are four-fold.

1. He has perfected forever them that are sanctified, as regards a deliverance from sin. Three hundred years before Christ came and might say thousands of years, but I am referring to Scripture, the Holy Ghost pointed Daniel to Him, and said, “He shall make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness.” Yes, He has gone to the very end of it. And in proportion as you find Christ revealed in you in proportion as the preciousness of Christ is known and enjoyed by you, so will you find an end of sin and you will go on finding him, and finding him, until by and by you find him perfectly, and completely, and eternally, and then, and not till then, will you find a complete, and a perfect, and an eternal end of sin.

2. He has perfected forever them that are sanctified as regards their justification. Christ not only went to the end of sin, but He also went to the end of the law. He obeyed it, fulfilled it, magnified it, in every jot and tittle: so that all who believe on him, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Oh, it is wonderful to see how the Old and New Testament saints connect their justification with their glorification. Isaiah says, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory." And Paul says, "whom He justified them He also glorified." Christ making an end of sin, and his going to the end of the law, were FOREVER, so that NOTHING shall be able to separate us from the love of God.

3. He perfected them as regards Qualification. Now let me ask you, have you these two things in your conscience? Ah, say you, what are they? Well, I will tell you. First, have you such a sight and sense of your awful condition by nature, that you know nothing, but the truth of God, the blood of Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost can do you any good? And secondly, Above all things, is it your desire to love what God loves, and to hate what God hates? If you have these two things powerfully wrought in your souls, then, though you have never been able to call God your God, yet, be assured of this, that you shall live forever. This qualification which the Holy Ghost has begun within you, is eternal; He will never forsake you, nor leave His work unfinished. Many doubts, and fears, and seasons of darkness, you may have, as I have had, (and I have learnt the meaning of that Scripture which says, "I sleep, but my heart wakes) but the internal qualification shall remain; because He has PERFECTED forever them that are sanctified. And

4. As regards Possession. The Jews never had a permanent possession of Jerusalem, but your possession of the New and Heavenly Jerusalem is secured to all eternity. But now I am coming to close quarters. "Ah," say you, "What are you going to say now?" I am going to tell you a plain broad truth. I am going to speak to you as though I should never speak to you again. And I say The Christ of God has perfected forever, all them that the Father gave unto Him and if you live and die at enmity against this great and solemn truth, as sure as God lives, you must be eternally lost. Oh, my brethren, in such momentous matters as these, there is nothing like being right down honest and straight forward: and I do really wish my brethren in the ministry were as zealous against Arminianism as they are against Pre-existerianism, for, although as you know, I am decidedly opposed to the latter; and would not by any means appear to soften down an error because it is not so flagrant as some others, yet am I still more and more persuaded to contend earnestly against the former.

There is a sort of charity that would make it appear possible for the Holy Ghost to be the raiser-up and teacher of men and ministers whose testimonies are at variance; but that can never be. We have two Johns in the Bible, John the Evangelist, and John the Divine. And what says John the Evangelist in his tenth chapter "The good Shepherd gives his life for his sheep." And what says John the Divine? Why, he says, "Whosoever was not found written in the Lamb's Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." There, you see their testimony is the same, there is no contradiction, "Ah," but then you say, "there was John Calvin, and John somebody else, they were both good men, but opposite in their views." Oh, no, there is no contradiction, nor opposition with God's Johns. The Devil may have his Johns as well as the Lord; the Devil may have his beloved parsons, as well as the Lord has his sent servants. All that we know very well. But among God's true servants there will be no essential opposition, they will be all free-grace men. The grand question,

then, is, “Do you love a free-grace God, or a free-will God? Do you love the Christ of God, or a Christ of man’s devising? In a word, Are you from above, or from beneath This is the grand turning point on which you can never be too close or too deeply concerned.