

Atonement for Inanimate Objects?

by John McPherson

Why is atonement for “things” necessary?

Leviticus 16:33 says, “Then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.”

“Reconciliation” is the equivalent term given for the same Hebrew word, kopher, in Dan. 9:24; Lev. 8:15; Ezek. 45:15. In the New Testament KJV once only “atonement” is used, Romans 5:11, “by whom (Christ) we have received the atonement.” (Fausset’s Bible Dictionary)

We can easily understand the need for human atonement or reconciliation before God because of our sins. This atonement was accomplished through the blood of Jesus. But why did the Old Testament Holy Sanctuary, the tabernacle, and the altar need atonement? Leviticus 16:16 explains why, “So he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.” Verses 17-19 explain how it was done. “There shall be no man in the tabernacle of meeting when he goes in to make atonement in the Holy Place, until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel. 18 And he shall go out to the altar that is before the Lord, and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and some of the blood of the goat, and put it on the horns of the altar all around. 19 Then he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.” Also read Leviticus 8:14-15 for another example of the same need.

Each one of the inanimate objects: the Holy Sanctuary, the tabernacle, and the altar were used in connection to man’s sin; and apparently were in need of cleansing because of it. Of course, they were not literally guilty of sin (impossible) but by their very use to implement man’s forgiveness of sin they were also considered defiled by God until they had been cleansed as well. It is a sobering view of sin isn’t it? Not only does sin contaminate our relationship with God but also it contaminates that which is around us. Thus, even the articles that dealt with sin in the Old Testament needed cleansing. “It was the people’s sin that defiled the places so as to make them unfit for the presence of the Holy One” (Fausset’s Bible Dictionary). Possibly the same idea is suggested by God’s instructions about building an altar to Him. Exodus 20:25, “And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it.” On the other end of things, God’s presence at a place makes it “holy ground” Exodus 3:5.

-- via bulletin of the Wilsonville Church of Christ
Wilsonville, AL

[Editor’s Note: John McPherson will be with us in our fall gospel meeting. We look forward to being with John and hearing him preach to us then].

251803