

## Curses, Atonement and Jubilee

Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live -- but live as He lives, by dying as He died who died to Himself.  
--George MacDonald, UNSPOKEN SERMONS, Third Series, *Freedom*

While I do not think it is an obvious problem, and presumably it is not even a major problem, I do get concerned when I meet people who constantly pray or bless themselves or others over every little setback or sin. I'm only slightly less concerned when someone feels the need to thank God for every little act that they might be tempted to attribute to themselves. It's not that I don't think we need God to get us through bad times, we most certainly do. It's just that Jesus taught us to look at God as a father. As a father myself, I never wanted my children to be over-reliant on me. It would be one thing for me to be summoned so I could teach them how to wash clothes; it's quite another to have them call me because they forgot to put detergent in the machine. It's one thing if they were to call me up and thank me because the dance lessons I took them to helped them find a significant other at a college dance; it's another if they call to thank me every time they tie their shoes like I showed them. I've no doubt God is more patient than I am, but we are made in His image (Genesis 1:27). I simply can't ignore the idea that God wants us to take initiative and responsibility for our lives. If He wanted automatons, He would not have needed to give us free will.

But there is one more thing to this phenomenon I noticed, and that is such people seem to be very much on edge, despite all their claims otherwise. Maybe they are and it's just a nervous tic or habit they cannot control, but Jesus tells us that, "By their fruits you will know them." (Matthew 7:20) If they find peace and security with the constant prayers and blessings, why do they always seem so anxious and scared? Perhaps things would be even worse if they didn't, I don't know. I do know that their steadfast faith in the face of constant discomfort will mean *a lot* in the next life. But, as they are our suffering brothers and sisters, we still have a responsibility to help them if we can. God will certainly take care of them in the next life, but He will also remember any lack of care we give them in this one. And by help, I mean in the sense of healing, not in the sense of "affirmation" that is so prevalent today. And one area I think we ought to consider in being able to give help is to downplay the "purity" side of Christianity a little bit and promote the "truth" (or understanding) side of Christianity a little more.

It's not that I'm saying we need to get rid of the "feel good" Christianity altogether, but rather to tone it down. Truth is equally important in the dualism of Christianity. And there are two truths I want to focus on here. One is how perceptions and expectations are inversely proportional to each other, and the other is the relationship between atonement and restoration.

It is counterintuitive to say the perceptions and expectations are inversely proportional. If one expects something, then one ought to perceive it when found. Quite the opposite is the case. If one is looking for a lost dog but doesn't know where to look, then the expectation at any given moment is that the dog will remain unseen. But when one comes across the dog, the dog stands out in sharp contrast to its surroundings. In the opposite case, if one expects one's car keys to be in the bedroom, then one is apt to walk right past them on the kitchen table on the way to the bedroom. Taking this to the main theme of this paper, if one expects the world to be a perfect place, then every imperfection will jump right out, but if one expects the world to be indifferent, then every kindness will be noted.

"But wait," one might ask, "why do so many people who hate the world act so suspicious when kindness is given?" Good question. Someone who expects a selfish world will certainly make note of someone who acts charitably (which is the point I'm trying to make), but that does not necessarily mean he will appreciate the charity. I'm sure the gentle reader knows people who complain over every little setback that happens, but if one offers them charity they ask, "Why, what's in it for you?" or "I don't want your pity!" One's actions were certainly perceived by this bitter person, but now one's own expectations (gratitude for the help) were challenged by quite the opposite response. One quickly forgets all those who did respond politely, but the one who responded in an ugly way is the one that is remembered. But let's get back to the main topic.

There is much beauty in prayers, meditations (including Adoration), self-reflections and self-discovery, religious retreats, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, faith healing, fasting, deliverances (including exorcisms), Christian music, and similar things. I will refer to these things collectively as "sanctification" in this paper. But again, what is one expecting from all this, as in *really* expecting? If one's life is "normal," then this question need not be answered, as one is perceiving what is healthy for one, with or without understanding. But if one perceives otherwise, then it is likely that there is an imbalance between purity and truth. An imbalance that needs to be adjusted on the truth side, which comes from understanding.

Biblically, what one ought to expect is the peace of Christ ("Peace I leave with you, *my* peace I give to you," John 14:27, italics mine). This is the only earthly reward we are promised from God, and any expectation we have of this life ought to be grounded in that. This isn't to say He won't reward us over and above this, but any such things are not to be expectations but rather surprises. If we don't expect them, then we will perceive them so much the better when they do come along. I suspect most people do believe this at a superficial level, but there is no healing at this *de minimis* state. We need to understand what is *really* expected within ourselves and others who are in need of healing if we hope to help. It is only when this core expectation is identified, and an effort made to change it, that healing can begin. And healing takes time. But once the unhealthy expectation is found, then one can focus on changing the unhealthy expectation to a healthier one.

With all that said, I want to address a barrier that can hamper or even sabotage the changing of unhealthy expectations: "Why, if I have been praying all this time, can't the world simply be made right for me?" Interestingly enough, despite the grand changes this or similar questions seem to ask isn't what usually gets to the individual. They may get stuck in a traffic jam for an hour and get frustrated, but it's when the spouse had a leaky pen in his pocket that ruined a shirt intended for dinner which really destroys the mood. But regardless of what troubles someone, this question is both logical and reasonable, especially in the cases of faith healings, deliverances and exorcisms: if the curses and demons who caused the problems are banished, then why are the problems still around?

Now, it is impossible to grasp the workings of God's mind, or to know what He knows. Why did one person have all signs of terminal cancer removed while another's broken home stays divided? But we can look to see what has been revealed in scripture and Apostolic Tradition and see if there are any patterns or clues to indicate the system He has set up for us, or at least reassure us that He is indeed working with us. And I believe, for this particular matter, we can find this in the *Yom Kippur* and the Year of Jubilee. I think it is here that we can find some understanding of God's plan, and possibly where we fit in it.

*Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) is the most holy day of the Jewish year, and it is found in several places in the Bible. Leviticus 16 gives a very detailed description of what is to happen during

this celebration, and why. Leviticus 23:26-32 sets the date when *Yom Kippur* is to take place (based on their lunar calendar), and Numbers 29:7-11 reaffirms the date as well as some additional sacrifices that need to take place during this time. The Letter to the Hebrews unequivocally identifies the sacrifice of Jesus as the final and perfect sacrificial lamb of *Yom Kippur*. And if one reads Leviticus 16, one ought to see a lot of additional connections between *Yom Kippur* and the Passion of Christ as told in all four Gospels. Most remarkably, just as the High Priest had to lay hands on the sacrificial lamb and pronounce the sins of the nation, the High Priests slapped Jesus and called out "blasphemy." Also note that two goats were used during *Yom Kippur*, one to be sacrificed and one to be let go. Jesus was sacrificed, Barabbas was let go.

And here is where we need to understand what *Yom Kippur* did *not* do. While the sin of the people was removed and forgotten during *Yom Kippur*, the wretched state of the people due to their sins remained. And while it was not tied to a holiday, we see this dynamic described quite poignantly in the case of King David's and Bathsheba's first child: "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan answered David: 'The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die. But since you have utterly spurned the Lord by this deed, the child born to you must surely die.'" (2 Samuel 12:13-14) Even within the *Yom Kippur*, those in debt remained in debt, those who were slaves remained slaves, those who lost their property were still landless. While I do not want to offend my Protestant brethren, I do believe it is contrary to biblical teachings to suggest that since Jesus died, we automatically and immediately get to go to Heaven upon death. The idea that justification (forgiveness of sins) and sanctification (becoming Christ like) fully takes place at the same time is the heart of the "Preservation of the Saints" theory favored by many non-apostolic churches, which is commonly described as "once saved, always saved." The assumption is that the spiritual *Yom Kippur* of Jesus has also made one's soul fully restored and therefore perfect. But we have no parallel in the Bible to support this assumption. Quite the opposite, we see that the lives of the people remained wretched despite forgiveness, although they did have the hope of being restored eventually. We ought to assume the same laws of God apply to our souls unless *explicitly* stated that this is no longer the case.

Moving on, we see that the word "mortify" is used three times between seven verses (Leviticus 23:26-32) in conjunction with atonement. Mortify means to feel ashamed and humiliated, and is also a commitment to self-reflection. This is sanctification in process, and is therefore out of place if sanctification is already completed. As Good Friday was the perfect and final *Yom Kippur*, Jesus did remove all sin from us once and for all (justification). But this does not in and of itself release us from our wretchedness, our obligation to reflect on what we did and still do wrong, nor the need to feel humiliated before God for our sins (the continued need for sanctification). While our wretchedness will no longer increase from sins so removed, we can still add more sins, and we can continue to suffer from past ones. Something else needs to happen, and it does. And, like the Jews of ancient times, we can hope that our sanctifying efforts here on Earth will be rewarded with full restoration of our souls after death because of this something else.

The full restoration of what sin took away is found in the Year of Jubilee (*Yovel*). *Yovel* is spelled out in Leviticus 25:8-55. It was a time of "homecoming." (verse 10) It was a time of forgiving debt (verse 28). It was a time slaves were set free (verse 10). It was a time of regaining ancestral land (verses 23-24). It was a time of living on the fruits of the land without labor (verse 11, a specific release from the Curse of First Man, "Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield" Genesis 3:17). I am going to take it as *a priori* that the gentle reader need not be convinced that this matches commonly held Christian visions of salvation and Heaven. We also have lesser forms of restoration taking place very seven years (the *Shemitah*, see Leviticus 25:1-7 and Deuteronomy 15:1-6). But *Yom Kippur* is still intimately tied to *Shemitah* and *Yovel*, as *Yom Kippur* introduced them when

they finally did come (Leviticus 25:9). So while justification and sanctification are likewise intimately tied together, they are nonetheless distinct and different, and need to be treated as such. While it is true that sometimes they do occur simultaneously, they usually don't (only 8 of 50 *Yom Kippurs* result in restoration, and 7 of them are only partial restorations).

So one does have to periodically sanctify oneself. But one must still do these things *without* the expectation that it will coincide with a full restoration, because while every year has a *Yom Kippur*, only a few years had restoration. Such sanctification may not make things better, but past sins will no longer make things worse.

But before I move on, I want to make one more comparison. The first Passover, I would argue, was the first *Yom Kippur*, or at least the *Yom Kippur* in nascent form. It was a call for the faithful to forsake the animal gods of the Egyptians by eating an animal just as official *Yom Kippurs* were to call the faithful to forsake their sins (which, biblically, were usually associated with the pagan idols and gods). Also, I would argue that Joshua's crossing of the Jordan was the nascent Year of Jubilee. It was then that the land God had given Israel first came into their possession, and to which future jubilees would renew, restore and refresh. While the gentle reader is free to accept or reject these comparisons as being meaningful, I will nonetheless hold the forty years between the First Passover and Joshua's entrance into the Holy Land as symbolic of one's life, as all those who forsook the covenant they made at Mount Sinai (also called Mount Horeb) died during these forty years.

I also want to point out Jesus' prophecy of woe against the scribes, Pharisees and other religious leaders, "All these things will come upon this generation." (Matthew 23:36) While I do not want to make a definitive argument over this, one would think that the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. would fit quite well with this prophecy. And as Jesus is believed to have been crucified on or about 30 A.D., we see again that a lifetime is represented by 40 years, at least in the sense of living with moral understanding. Those who are finally justified at death represent the first forty years after the previous jubilee. Those who go to Purgatory represent the forty-first to forty-ninth years. Those who died before the age of accountability are represented by the fiftieth year. This brings us full circle to those who have unhealthy expectations of what all the sanctifying events will produce.

If one purifies oneself, and has the expectation that immediately all will be right again, then one will likely be disappointed as we have no idea when our personal Year of Jubilation will be. The testimony of miracles throughout Christianity's two thousand years shows that jubilee certainly *can* be right away (symbolically, the fiftieth year). But there are those who won't have a jubilee in *this* life (symbolically, more than a 39 year wait). Others may see the jubilee before departing this world, but at an unpredictable and unexpected time (symbolically, up to a 39 year wait). A few may go straight to Heaven after death (symbolically, a 40-year wait), while others have to go to Purgatory (symbolically, more than a 41-year wait).

It appears that the wise will expect a coming restoration as a result of their atonement, but have no expectation as to when the jubilee will happen. The wise should expect continued tribulation in this lifetime, and perhaps even in Purgatory. This way, when the personal restoration does take place, it will be unexpected, and therefore easily perceived and fully appreciated for what it is.

And as a final message of hope, do not despair if it seems God has forgotten His promise in regards to the jubilee. Remember that 400 years separated the last recognized prophet and the coming of Saint Yohanan (John in English) the Baptist. His father's name was Zichaya (in English, Zachariah), which means, "God has remembered." John's mother's name was Elishevah (Elizabeth in English),

which means, "the oath of God." We too can make this marriage within ourselves by knowing that "God has remembered the oath of God," and the offspring of this marriage within us will be Yohanan, "The Grace of God."

The more we are afflicted in this world, the greater is our assurance in the next; the more we sorrow in the present, the greater will be our joy in the future.

--Saint Isidore

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