

ATONEMENT v DIVISION

A pivotal passage to understand the meaning of the festival known as the Day of Atonement is Leviticus chapter 16, which describes a ceremony involving two goats. In this ceremony two goats were brought to the door of the tabernacle. Lots were cast where God's will was sought as to which part of the ceremony that each of these goats would then play next.

One of the goats, the first goat mentioned in the chapter, became a sin offering. It was taken outside the camp and killed and its blood would be taken back to the tabernacle or the Temple later on. No man was allowed to enter the inner sanctum of the tabernacle where the ark of the covenant was with the one exception. The High Priest, just once a year, was to take some of the blood of this first goat killed as a sin offering and sprinkle it on the mercy seat.

We are told what happens with the second goat in verses 21 and 22 of Leviticus 16. We are told that the other goat was to have the sins of the congregation confessed upon it and then a fit man was to drive out the goat to an uninhabited wilderness.

To the Jews, who know this day by its Hebrew name Yom Kippur, this is treated as the holiest day of the year. They treat it with the same soberness that we, in the church, treat Passover. To the Jews they do not recognise the personal atonement of Christ's sacrifice in the feast of Passover. At Passover they only recognise their national salvation from the plagues and their captivity in Egypt. On this day, the Day of Atonement, they primarily focus on the national atonement offered through the sin offering of the first goat.

The Day of Atonement is listed amongst the latter festivals which, from our church perspective, look forward to end time events. Because of this, we, in the church, tend to more focus on the meaning of the part of the ceremony played by the second goat. The second goat wasn't killed but exiled into the wilderness. We have interpreted the meaning of this to refer to what happens to Satan the Devil when Christ returns and brings the Kingdom of God to this earth. In verses 1 to 3 of Revelation 20 we read how an angel will bind Satan and lock him in a bottomless pit for a thousand years so that he cannot deceive the nations like he does in this age.

That is going to be a wonderful time which we look forward to when Satan can no longer deceive the nations with his constant broadcasts of moods and impulses stirring people up to disobey God. In this age, though, we do have to battle against his moods and impulses.

The English word atone can be seen to be a composite of two words – at one. Viewed that way it conveys the idea of being reconciled, being united and one with God. That is what God wants for His children – to be united both with Him and with each other.

Satan, on the other hand, is the great thief who wants to steal, kill and destroy. He is the great archetype of the fictional character Darth Vader who turned to the Dark Side, only far more nastier! Satan wants to destroy everything that is important to the heart of God. What is closest to the heart of God is His children, His family – those who are a part of His church now.

In John 10:11 Jesus says that He is the good shepherd. A few verses down in verse 16 he talks about gathering other sheep so that they may be one flock. In contrast, the wolf in verse 12 seizes the sheep and scatters them.

God wants us to be at one with Him. Satan, on the other hand, wants to do the very opposite of the theme of atonement. His modus operandi is to divide and conquer. In 2 Corinthians 2:11 the apostle Paul wrote about not letting Satan take advantage of us and not being ignorant of his devices.

How does Satan go about dividing us and what can we do to counter his moves to try and divide us from each other and to divide us from God? Let's look at just a couple of those moves that he uses to try and divide us.

The first of those I'd like to look at is the spirit of accusation.

Satan is referred to as "the accuser of our brethren" over in Revelation 12:10 and he loves to use accusations to divide us from each other. How does Satan try and inject this spirit of accusation into us? How does it play out? Why do people gossip and sow discord?

In an old Good News article entitled "Gossip – Doing the Devil's Work for Him" the author writes:

People of low self esteem tend to gossip. They do not respect themselves, so they gossip about others and pull them down. This allows their own egos to rise on the ruin of others. The gossipier experiences a temporary illusion of worth, but quickly descends even lower than before...

Frustration produces gossipers, too. You can't have everything you want. Perhaps you are dissatisfied with your situation in life...So what do you do...Some...talk, talk, talk and devour their neighbours away. After gossiping they feel better for a little while...then the reality hits them again.

I've seen this pattern repeat itself a number of times in the church and watched how low self esteem and pride, which are seemingly opposite work together in some people to cause division. Someone insecure with low self esteem sees someone else with an advantage that they don't have, whether it's a material possession, a relationship that they don't have or they have a position or power that they crave. They'll then put another person down over real or imagined faults that they've made up or exaggerated.

Often they will fool themselves by convincing themselves that they are just trying to help the other person by pointing out their supposed faults so they can see them and fix them - when in reality they are just trying to get one-up on the other person.

Due to their own insecurity or low self esteem the thought of taking the inferior position of confessing their faults and being seen to be wrong (which is part of what real repentance is) is, to them, too fearful a thing to do; so, a form of pride gets in the way and stops them from taking ownership of what they have done and repenting. When I've seen it happen from

time to time, it leaves me scratching my head wondering "Don't they realise that they've just been manipulated by Satan to cause division?"

King David gave us a solution to ensure that we don't fall victim to the spirit of accusation. Over in Psalm 141, verse 3 he wrote: "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing."

There is a difference between constructive and destructive criticism that comes from the true motives that we have when we offer criticism. Like David said, we need to put a check on ourselves whenever we offer criticism and make sure our motives are pure and only criticise in a constructive and supportive way and never in a destructive way where we are trying to get one-up on someone else.

A second way that Satan tries to divide us is to entice us with counterfeits that draw us away from God and away from other people.

The Apostle Paul warns us about this over in 2 Corinthians 11. Starting from verse 3 we read:

"But I fearlest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, so your thoughts should be corrupted from the simplicity due to Christ. For if, indeed, the one coming proclaims another Jesus, whom we have not proclaimed, or if you receive another spirit, which you did not receive, or another gospel, which you never accepted, you might well endure these...(dropping down to verse 13) For such ones are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. Did not even Satan marvelously transform himself into an angel of light? Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness."

In his book "The Ultimate Source of All Supernatural Phenomena" Ronald Wlodyga writes the following:

Satan has tried his best to be like God, and in effect has counterfeited or substituted everything God has revealed to him. But everything Satan has changed is inferior, perverted and twisted-just like him. The following are some of the Great Counterfeiter's accomplishments:

He counterfeited Christ's birthday for Nimrod's. He counterfeited God's church with a false church that masquerades as the true church. He counterfeited God's ministers with his false ministers. He counterfeited God's doctrines by changing: a) The Sabbath for Sunday. b) Easter for Passover. c) God's family with a trinity. Satan always mixes a little bit of truth with a lot of lies and...copies, duplicates, impersonates, - imitates, COUNTERFEITS God's truth!"

In the last 20 years we have seen just successful Satan has been in dividing God's people using counterfeit doctrines.

Some subtle counterfeits that are pushed onto us by our left-wing media include humanism and political correctness. While we may not be fooled by the major doctrines where we differ from mainstream christianity there are more subtle doctrines that do the rounds in the

Church of God. And then there are our own personal pet ideas which we have to be cautious about as they may turn out to be subtle counterfeits that we can get emotionally carried away with.

Proverbs 3:5 talks about trusting in God and not leaning on our own understanding. We have to have humility and not lean on own understanding but diligently seek the truth from God and wisdom from a multitude of counselors.

While beliefs and doctrines can be counterfeits, Satan's ultimate counterfeit is His way of get. Satan tells us that the way to happiness is His get way which is a counterfeit to God's true way of give and love to others.

The lesson of how to deal with counterfeits is embedded in the day of Atonement ceremony with the two goats. The only way that they could tell which goat was the one for the Lord and which goat was the one for Azazel was to cast lots and seek the answer from God.

Just before Jesus died as an atonement for our sins there was an incident that bears some similarity with the two goats ceremony on the Day of Atonement.

In an effort to avoid crucifying Him Pilate, knowing that Jesus was innocent of any crimes offered the Jews a choice of freeing either Jesus or Barabbas. The name Barabbas or Barabbas means Son of the Exalted Father. Mark 15:7 notes that he committed murder during an insurrection. Some might label him as a freedom fighter and some scholars note that he may have been one of a number of false messiahs around this time.

The Jews in the crowd did not recognise the true Messiah and made a poor choice regarding who should die and who should be let go yet God allowed it to ensure that His purpose would ultimately stand.

In conclusion, Satan is always looking for any opening, any way that he can divide and conquer us. Let's be diligent and make sure that we don't ever give him a chance.

Firstly, let's put a check on our motives and set a watch on our mouth to make sure that everything we say comes from a heart that wants to build others up and not tear others down and second, let's not lean our own understanding when it comes to doctrinal views and the way that we live our life but seek God's guidance in everything so that they we are not enticed to go after Satan's counterfeits. If we do so, we will truly be at one with God and at one with each other.