

The Love of God

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"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

"God is love." His matchless love for fallen man, expressed in the gift of his beloved Son, amazed the holy angels. Christ was the heir of all things, by whom also the worlds were made. He was the brightness of the Father's glory, and the "express image of his person." He upheld "all things by the word of his power." In himself he possessed divine excellence and greatness; for it pleased the Father that in him all fullness should dwell. And Christ "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Yet he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The Son of God volunteered to die in the sinner's stead, thus making it possible for man, by a life of obedience, to escape the penalty of the divine law, which he had transgressed. The death of Christ did not slay the law, lessen its holy claims, nor detract from its sacred dignity; on the contrary, the death of God's beloved Son on the cross justified the claims of the divine law, and proclaimed the justice of his Father in punishing the transgressor, in that he consented to suffer the penalty in his own person, to save fallen man from its curse. He thus magnified the law, and made it honorable, and gave evidence of its changeless character. From his own lips is heard the words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

In becoming man's substitute, and bearing the curse which should have fallen upon him, Christ pledged himself in behalf of the race to maintain the sacred claims and the exalted honor of his Father's law. The Father has given the world into the hands of his Son, that through his mediatorial work he may completely vindicate the holiness and the binding claims of every precept of the divine law. This is the work of Christ, to convince men of sin, which is the transgression of the law, and through his mediation to bring them back to the path of obedience.

The plan of redemption, embracing the good news of salvation through Christ, was first preached to Adam. It was to him the star of hope, lighting up the dark and dreaded future. Adam saw that the promised Redeemer was the only means by

which he could have life. The plan of saving sinners has been the same in every generation. The patriarchs, prophets, and all the holy men of old, looked forward to a coming Saviour, in whom they showed their faith by sacrificial offerings. The blood of animals had shadowed forth the sinless offering made on Calvary; but at the crucifixion type met antitype, and the typical system was done away by the great antitypical offering.

Christ is the center of the great plan of redemption, a plan which is a unit, and covers all dispensations. He is the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He is the Redeemer of the fallen sons and daughters of Adam in all the ages of human probation. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

The gospel was preached to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, and was to them good news; for their faith embraced a coming Saviour. A more clear and glorious light now shines upon the Christian world; for that which was faith to the patriarchs and prophets who lived before Christ, is assurance to us, as we see that Christ has come just in the manner that inspired men of old had foretold that he would come. It is just as essential that we have faith in a Redeemer who has come and died our sacrifice, as it was for the holy men of old to believe in a Redeemer to come, whom they represented by their typical sacrifices, but no more so.

In order to fully realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited views of the sufferings of Christ, many place a low estimate on the great work of atonement. They think that Christ suffered only a small portion of the penalty of the law of God. They know that the wrath of God was felt by his dear Son; but they suppose that through all his painful sufferings he had the evidence of his Father's love and acceptance, and that the portals of the tomb before him were illuminated with bright hope.

There are many whose hearts are no more deeply stirred by the humiliation and death of Christ than by the death of the martyrs of Jesus. Many have suffered death by slow tortures, and some by crucifixion. In what does the death of God's dear Son differ from these? It is true that he died upon the cross a most cruel death; yet others for his sake have suffered equally, so far as bodily torture is concerned. Why, then, was the suffering of Christ more dreadful than that of other persons who have yielded their lives for his sake? Had his suffering consisted in bodily pain alone, then his death was no more painful than that of some of the martyrs; but bodily pain was only a small part of the agony of the beloved Son of God as he hung upon the cross. The sins of the world were upon him, and also the sense of his Father's wrath against the sinner, as he suffered the penalty of the law. It was these that crushed his divine soul. It was the hiding of his Father's face, a feeling that his own dear Father had forsaken him as he drank the cup which the sinner so richly merited, that brought despair to his soul. The separation that sin makes

between God and man was fully realized and keenly felt by the innocent, suffering Man of Calvary. He was oppressed by the powers of darkness, and had not one ray of light to brighten the future. His mental agony on this account was so great that man can have but a faint conception of it.

In his last conflict, Jesus felt the power of Satan, who declared himself superior in strength to the Son of God. He suggested that God had disowned his Son, that he was no longer in the divine favor, but was now in the hands of his great enemy. Christ yielded not to the torturing foe, even in his bitterest anguish. Legions of evil angels were all about him; yet the holy angels were bidden not to break their ranks, and engage in conflict with the taunting, railing adversary, nor were they permitted to minister to the anguished spirit of the divine sufferer. It was in this terrible hour of darkness, the face of his Father hidden, legions of evil angels enshrouding him, the sins of the world upon him, that from his pale lips were wrenched the words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

When the atonement is viewed correctly, when we realize the great price that has been paid to rescue sinful man from eternal death, the salvation of souls will be felt to be of infinite value. In comparison with the worth of everlasting life, everything else sinks into insignificance. But how have the counsels of our loving Saviour been despised. In many cases the heart's devotions are given to the world, and selfish interests have closed the door against the Son of God. Hollow hypocrisy and pride, selfishness and love of gain, envy, malice, and passion, have so filled the heart that Christ can have no room.

We should take larger, broader, and deeper views of the life, sufferings, and death of the Son of God. He was eternally rich; yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. He was clothed with light and glory, surrounded with hosts of heavenly angels waiting to execute his commands; yet he put on our nature, and came to sojourn among sinful men.

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Here is love that no language can express, the love of the Father and the Son, which should thrill our souls, and fill them with gratitude, and love, and joy. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doeth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The followers of Christ should learn here to reflect in some degree the divine love that has been manifested toward them, and by and by they may unite with the redeemed host in ascribing "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

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