

[ORIGINAL.]

The Sacrifice Once Offered.

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IN one brief, expressive sentence St. Paul sets forth the significance of the death of Jesus—"He loved me and gave Himself for me." It was the death of one whom even His enemies themselves declared to be spotless and innocent, and who voluntarily, out of love to us, gave Himself up to suffer and die as our substitute and Saviour.

Its significance is two-fold. It is at once a revelation and a propitiation.

The death of Jesus is a REVELATION. He who dies is the Son of God, whose mission was to show us the Father, and who is Himself the Brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His Substance. The death of Jesus is the unveiling of the eternal love of God for men. Men had come to doubt, distrust, yea, even to deny that God loved them. They thought of Him as one who was their enemy, and who needed to be atoned and made propitious to them by gifts and sacrifices. The death of Christ showed that this was all wrong; that, although they had ceased to love God, He had never ceased to love them, that His love had borne with their distrust and hatred and provocation, and yet had not loosened its hold upon them.

The death of Christ is the GRAND DEMONSTRATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD FOR MEN. Love in God is like light in the sun, like water in the ocean; we cannot speak of the one without the other—they are inseparable, identical. God is love, and Christ is the perfect expression of that divine love, transcending all description and all thought. The love which revealed itself in the Cross, is love which always has existed and which always exists, as pure, as deep, as self-sacrificing as ever.

But the death of Jesus is also a REVELATION OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, of His wrath against sin as well as of His love for the sinner. Nowhere do we behold the real character of sin as in the Cross of Christ. It does not seem to us so very evil. We have become accustomed to it. But to God, sin is the evil and bitter thing which He hateth. He cannot tolerate it. He will not pass it by. The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. The cross makes manifest the enormity of human sin, and the awful reality of the divine displeasure against it.

But the death of Jesus is also a PROPITIATION.

It not only reveals God's love and holiness, and, at the same time, the sin and need of the sinner; it also accomplishes a work of reconciliation. Two things hinder our return to the fellowship of God; one barrier exists in God Himself, the other in us. Both must be removed. In regard to God there must be a reconciliation effected between His love and His righteousness. His love seeks to save us: His righteousness condemns us. How, therefore, can God be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly? Herein lies the unsearchable mystery of the atonement of Christ. Yet no truth is more plainly set forth in the Scriptures. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust." "Christ once offered to bear the sins of many." "Who His own self bear our sins in His own body on the tree." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." He "died for our sins." He "died for us." In these and many other passages, Christ's death is represented as a Vicarious Death, as a Ransom and as a Propitiation. Such are the facts, however we may explain them. The truth is unsearchable; dark with excess of light; so high that we cannot attain unto it. Every explanation must after all remain inadequate. Yet we know that our God is our Saviour; that the Law-giver, He whose prerogative is to inflict the penalty of the law, has himself borne that penalty. He asserts the just punishment of sin, not by inflicting suffering upon the sinner, but by enduring suffering Himself. The troubled conscience grasps the truth, and finds peace. The heart, distracted with guilt and fear of judgment, rests in unshaken confidence upon the sacrifice and atonement of Christ "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

The truth of the atonement, grasped by a living faith, not only gives peace to the conscience, but quickens a divine love in the heart. The sacrifice of Christ kindles within the heart a love like to that love of which it is the manifestation. It makes us partakers of the divine life which it enables us to receive and appropriate. Christians are united to Christ. They live in Him and receive from Him power and grace. As they died in Christ's death, so they live in Christ's life. In His death our sin dies, and in His life the very life of God is made our own. Christ's death was an expiation for sin, for it was the Divine Act which renders the punishment of sin unnecessary. It was a representative death—for us, in our stead. It was a ransom by which we are delivered from those evils which sin entails upon us. It was a satisfaction to the righteousness of God, and a sacrifice for sin, an acknowledgment of its guilt and a submission to its penalty. But it is in the