

[R77 : page 5]

The Gospel in the Light of Human Nature.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Rom. 5:8.

That "God is love" and unchangeable we believe to be prime facts of the gospel; and that man alone is alienated and needs reconciliation. The death of Christ was not for the purpose of purchasing God's love: it is above price; nor for the purpose of appeasing – quieting, pacifying, or cooling down – God's wrath, as though he were excited and hated man, but by meeting a necessity of man, in his relation to a broken law, to express God's love for man. It is a great mistake to think that God ever did, or ever will hate man. God devised the plan, provided the Ransom, and sent his Son to die for us, because he loved us. [John 3:16.] This is one great fact the world needs to know.

Love appreciated will produce love in return. "We love him because he first loved us." Then God loved us when we knew him not and even though we hated him. Parents and teachers, beware! If you tell those under your care, that God will love them if they are good, you make the impression on their minds that he will hate them if they are bad, which is false. By such means you make the wall higher, or the gulf deeper between them and the Lord, and though, you may, through fear, succeed in driving them to outward obedience, or gather them into the nominal church, by a "profession of religion," they may be as far from God as before, for only the goodness of God leadeth to repentance. Had we the power of ten thousand voices, we would proclaim, that God loved us while we were yet sinners, and Christ died to commend that love.

"But," it is sometimes said, "you must believe it, Christ died for you, if you will believe." Indeed! Believe what? Believe that

Christ died for you, of course. But if it is not true, I have no right to believe it, and my believing would not make it true. On the other hand, its being a fact that Christ died for me, is the best possible reason for believing it, and all the unbelief possible could not make it untrue. Truth is entirely independent of man's faith or unbelief, Faith in or knowledge of, a fact cannot make, or change, the fact, but it changes the man.

God loves us whether we believe it or not, and Christ died for us whether we believe it or not, but the knowledge of these truths must exist, before gratitude and love can spring up in our hearts, and loving obedience result. Whatever facts or changes were produced by the death of Christ, are real, and not dependent on our believing, any more than is the fact that Christ died. If it be true, [as some teach, but which we do not believe] that the death of Christ secures spiritual life for some, we think it would follow of necessity that it would secure it for all, because Christ died for all. 2 Cor. 5:14,15. Heb. 2:9 and 1 Tim. 2:6.

What Christ's death does not secure for every one, it secures for none.

While the death of Christ does not secure spiritual life for any, it makes it possible for all, and on account of man's relation to the law, as dead, without Christ's death spiritual life would not be attainable.

Repentance is a necessity in order to gain spiritual life, and without the motive of love, as presented to us in the death of Christ, repentance toward God would be impossible. But neither God's love, nor Christ's death, produce repentance in man, until man believes in the love and death. Hence God's love would be fruitless, were men allowed to remain in ignorance of the truth. God's love does not exhaust itself in the death of Christ, though that death commends it, for God has constituted Christ not only the Redeemer

but the Light of the world. He engaged not only to save man from death by a Ransom, but to bring man to the knowledge of that truth. 1 Tim. 2:4. Hence Christ is the "True light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." John 1:9. Not all at once nor in one age, but, it is "to be testified in due time." 1 Tim. 2:6.

Now it is evident, that man cannot repent, because of a truth, until he knows that truth, and yet when known, the truth is the "Foundation of repentance from dead works." The greatest possible sin is to "sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth;" and for this there remaineth no more sacrifice." Heb. 10:26, and it is impossible "to renew them again unto repentance; seeing, they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." Heb. 6:4,6.

We believe, then, that the death of Christ is an expression of God's love, and that in order to win man from sin to holiness one of the first things a man needs to learn, is that Christ died for him.

But how does the death of Christ show, or commend, God's love? It will not do to say it shows it because it shows it. That would be about equal to saying, God hates sin because he hates it, which is no reason at all. God hates sin because he loves his creatures; sin being their destroyer. If the death of Christ shows God's love to us, there must be something accomplished by that death which is adapted to man's necessities. Paul is talking of Christ's death on the cross, which was in "due time," i.e. the appointed time – "After the 62 weeks." Dan. 9:26.

Christ did not die twice. His becoming a man, was not by laying down, as in death, his preexistent life. He gave up the glory, and afterward prayed: "Glorify thou me, [R77 : page 6] with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." John 17:5.

We assert freely that Christ's death must have been; in some way adapted to the necessity of human nature, or it would not have been, what Paul asserts, an expression, or proof of God's love. What man does not need, even if it were provided, would not be gospel. If a man is hungry, bread alone would satisfy the want. If he thirsts, a cup of water from the hand of a friend would be an expression of love. And so of any want; but to say that God would seek to show his love by anything which was of no use to man, would be to ignore every idea of the harmony between God's wisdom and goodness.

There can be no doubt in any reasonable Christian mind, that the Gospel, in all its parts, takes man's need into account. Christ's life was necessary, as an example of loyalty, of patience in suffering, of devotion to his Father, of the principle of love even to enemies, and of overcoming evil with good. It was by his earth life and experience, that he learned to sympathize with man in temptations, in poverty and other afflictions, and so he was fitted to be a merciful and faithful Highpriest; having been tempted in all points as we are, and yet without sin. Heb. 4:15. And one feature of his work since his resurrection, clearly is, to give us the benefit of his former experience, by giving aid to the tempted. (Heb. 2:18.) He is not only a sympathizing friend, but also the giver and sustainer of spiritual life until it culminates in immortality. We wish it distinctly understood that we value the life of Christ, both before his death and after his resurrection as necessarily adapted to the wants of human nature. But why should any one ignore or belittle his death because of the value of his life? One link in the chain of provisions for man would thus be destroyed.

But we are told by some, that Christ "gave his life (not his death) a ransom." But this is equivalent to the statement, "Christ died for our sins." The Greek word, *Psuchee*, rendered "life" in the above

passage, never, unless we are greatly mistaken, refers to a period of existence, but to the nature of man as represented and sustained by the blood. Many other statements of the word agree with these in showing that Christ's death meets a necessity of man. "Behold the Lamb of God, (lamb led to the slaughter. Isa. 53:7.) which taketh away the sin of the world." John 1:29.

The sin of the world is the sin of Adam, for "in him all have sinned." Rom. 5:12 Margin. This left man "without strength." (Ver. 6.) "And in due time Christ died for the ungodly." The sin made mankind "enemies," and we were "reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Ver. 10. "God laid on him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53:6. And he "bore our sins on his own body [R78 : page 6] on the tree." 1 Pet. 2:24. He did not "lead" our sins, but is our Leader, or "Forerunner," into the heavenlies, and "he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Heb. 9:26. "And I, if I be lifted up from the Earth, will draw all men unto me." And, as if to anticipate, and answer criticisms, it is added: "This he said, signifying what death he should die." John 12:32,33. It seems clear, that the sacrifice of Christ, covers all sin, except what Paul calls the willful sin. Heb. 10:26. And doubtless this is why the Saviour could say: "All manner of sin and blasphemy SHALL BE FORGIVEN unto men, but the blasphemy, against the Spirit, shall not be forgiven unto men." Matt. 12:31. It does not say may be forgiven, but shall be. What! Without repentance? No, but God, as has been shown, by his goodness leadeth men to repentance. The death of Christ commends his love, Christ as the Light brings men to the knowledge of the truth, and thus the goodness secures repentance.

Evidently the recovery of all, is as complete in Christ, as was the loss through Adam.

It is strange that any person, thus saved from the curse of sin and death, should sin willfully and be lost, but we believe that facts

as well as scripture sustain the idea that men fall away after being enlightened.

Dead men need a Redeemer; Christ gave his life a Ransom. (The reason that men die, though Christ's natural life was given as a Substitute, is because men in the plan were counted dead already, and Christ did not give his life to prevent men from dying but to prevent them from remaining dead, or to redeem them from death.) Man is a sinner; Christ saves from sin. Man is mortal, even when redeemed; (except the church, who are raised a spiritual body.) Christ is the Author and Giver of immortality. Man is ignorant – in darkness: Christ is the true light, both as Teacher and our great Example. Man is weak and readily discouraged: Christ is a sympathizing friend. All fullness we find in him, just what men need is provided and no more; more would not be gospel, though provided. An appreciation of his fullness, tends to humility and to dependence on him, but whoever ignores any feature of Christ's work, in that particular overestimates himself and is in danger.

Oh, that God's love may speedily win many from sin unto holiness, and lead them to seek, by a patient continuance in well doing, for glory and honor and immortality. To such the reward of eternal life is promised. Rom. 2:7.

J. H. P.

[R77 : page 6]

FAITH triumphs over reason by receiving the revelation of the God of reason.
