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THE CROSS OF CHRIST

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o’er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story,
Gathers round its head sublime.”

The cross as the representative of the death of Christ and plan of redemption, has always been to the Christian the center of attraction, and to glory in the cross the chief mark of the Christian’s joy. The estimate in which it has been held by men in general has marked this line between the Church and the world; so that while the Church clings to it as the ground of all its hopes, it has been to the world the stumblingstone or the butt of contempt. What is precious in the sight of God and the hearts of His chosen, is foolishness to men in general. 1 Cor. 1:22-31.

[Because some of the children of God have, under peculiar influences, and for a time, undervalued the cross, it does not change this general principle.]

The value of the cross as the center of interest, the basis of hope and the key of truth is beautifully illustrated by the two equal cherubims, looking inward to the Mercy Seat, where God’s presence in mercy appeared; representing, as they do, the equality of the Jewish and Gospel dispensations, between which at the “Fullness of time” our Lord came, and, meeting the claims of both, as the great antitypical Offering, was slain for us. Under the former dispensation those who understood the typical offerings, looked *forward* to the cross, and in the gospel dispensation we, by faith inspired by the Spirit and aided by the simple ordinances of the gospel, look back to the same central point. There, at the cross, the Church, old and new, meet by faith, and, bowing before Christ, our “Mercy Seat,” witness the manifestation of the infinite mercy; for in Christ as the “Mercy Seat,” God meets with man, and there they taste the sweets of grace and begin to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

To remove from the Bible, if it were possible, the cross of Christ, and its relative teachings would virtually destroy it. *He* is the golden thread extending through it as a web from end to end, giving it strength, beauty and its real worth. Without him it would be an uninteresting arrangement of words, an empty case, a comb without the honey, a shell without the kernel, or the body without the life; and we, poor, sinful, dying men would pass on without one ray of light or hope to the future, dark and all unknown; and the cross is the *center* of interest and hope, around which, as bees around the honey, God’s people have always clustered, drawing from it their joy, strength

and life. The cross is also the key of truth in all that pertains to man, his nature, his life, and his relation to God. It is the basis of the atonement, the resurrection and restitution, and, while it does not of itself secure eternal life to any, it makes that life *possible* to *all*. God, in the gospel, provides for man's *necessities*, both as a *sinner* and a *mortal*. Because He was mortal, sin killed him, and "so death passed upon all men." Rom. 5:12. Mankind being dead (so counted even before execution), one died for all. 2 Cor. 5:14. The *man* Christ Jesus gave himself a *ransom* for all. 1 Tim. 2:5,6, and so receives the right and power to deliver the captives. Heb. 2:14,15. If the gospel did *not* provide for man's necessities, it would not be what the angels announced: "Glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people." "Testified in due time."

As a treasure-house containing *all* we need—resurrection from death, pardon for sin, and immortality for our mortality—the gospel becomes a glorious expression of the Father's love. The wisdom, power and love of God are all engaged for man's salvation, and all find expression in the gospel of Christ, the center of which is the cross. We do not take the ground that a perfect *knowledge* of the *relation* the cross sustains to the other elements of the gospel is necessary in order to have a share in the benefits of the atoning sacrifice. The *primary* benefits are universal and unconditional, as was the curse through Adam. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." It is doubtful, too, if one in ten of the *saints* of God have even understood that much, and yet they have secured and enjoyed a share in the great and special salvation, by the impartation of the Holy Spirit, the salvation which the atonement makes possible for all. It is not necessary to understand the *philosophy* of atonement in order to be reconciled to God, any more than it is necessary to understand the *science* of astronomy in order to enjoy the benefit of the light of the sun. It is, however, the privilege of a *child of God* to learn all he can of what the Father has revealed. And we freely take the ground that *no theory* of man's nature, loss in Adam, restitution, hope and destiny, *can be true*, that ignores or belittles the doctrine of the cross. Such theories dishonor Christ, though not always purposely, and by casting into the shade certain comforting truths of God's great plan, they certainly hide many rays of Father's love, and therefore greatly mar the enjoyment of the Christian's life. As God has *revealed* nothing in vain, the more perfectly we can see the relation of His various truths, the better we will understand *Him*, and thus, by sympathy with Him, or rather fellowship of His Spirit, we shall be enabled to cultivate and grow up into the qualities of character most pleasing to Him, and which will best fit us for His purposes here and hereafter.

The doctrine of the cross underlies the doctrine of atonement, or loss in Adam and gain in Christ, both being unconditional, and hence the price or ransom paid by the man Christ Jesus, must determine both the *nature* and *extent* of the *loss* to mankind by Adam. *More* than was needed would have been useless, and that God's wisdom would not give; *less* than was needed would not *redeem*, and God's love could not withhold.

The darkness of the theological dogmas of the Church has doubtless for many reasons cast a mist over the *simplicity* of the teachings of the cross. *Life* was the nature and extent of the forfeit of Adam, and in him of all. "For the wages of sin is death." "Dying thou shalt die," was a *process* culminating in death. "Sin, when it is *finished* (not when it commences) bringeth forth death." But what *kind* of death, natural or spiritual? we are asked. The mother church and nearly all, if not all, her daughters answer, *spiritual* death. The theological writings are full of such teachings. That is nothing *new*, and for some of us to accept it would be to take a *long stride backward*.

But to answer the question, "What kind of life," we resort to the Divine key—the cross, and ask, what kind of life did the "*man* Christ Jesus" *lose*? That must settle it, and the fog will clear away from all minds who will look at the facts. Mark, it is not, "what kind of life did the pre-existent Word lose (if He lost any) in *becoming* a man?" for it was the "*man* Christ Jesus" that gave His life a ransom for all. "He died for our sins." He took man's nature for the express purpose "that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man," "Even the *death* on the cross."

This gives us clearly to understand that it was *human* life he gave as a

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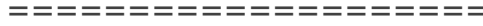
ransom. Hence it was the same *kind* of life that required redemption. It was not in Christ's case a necessity as in the case of a *sinner*, but by *voluntary* offering as a Redeemer. Spiritual death is a state of sin. "You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin." But Christ was not a sinner, and could not therefore die a spiritual death. In his *obedience* lay the divine efficacy of the price. Sinners need conversion, but Christ did not, and "As in Adam all die so in Christ shall all be made alive, *Christ the firstfruits*" &c.

So this passage can have no reference to conversion, or coming to the knowledge of the truth.

This is evident also from the further statement, "They that are Christ's at his presence" [parousia] Christ's are not then counted but raised to immortality, hence this passage can have no reference to conversion, but is a positive declaration that all mankind will be restored to life by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The ransom paid secures to Christ the power to raise the dead. Life restored is the proper basis of hope, the ground on which man must build, hence the cross is the basis of man's hope of glory. No wonder then that Paul should say: "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

J. H. P.



— February, 1880 —



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