

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW

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## The Devotional Hour

### III. Behold

WE of the modern time live much more in the attitude of the interrogation than of the exclamation, which in England is called "the point of admiration." We blur our world with question-marks and meantime lose the sense of wonder and sometimes even the power of vision.

It is interesting and refreshing to note how frequently the great spiritual teachers of the New Testament introduce their message with the word "Behold!" Both wonder and vision are there. They speak because they see and want their hearers and readers to see, and with the seeing are joined radiance, rapture, and joy. Their "behold!" is always more than an interjection. It has the force of an imperative, as tho they would say: "Look there! Just see what I see! Open your eyes to the full meaning and glory of what is there before you, waiting to be seen!"

This is, of course, the method of all great teachers. They are great teachers exactly because they see the important facts, laws, and realities in their chosen field and can make their students see them. They do not invent or create; they reveal, they unveil what is there. The same thing is true of great leaders. They lead because they have vision and can impart it. Instead of staring helplessly at the stubborn evils which are entrenched in social or national life, they look through and see a solution. They discover a better possible condition and make the men around them see it.

This was the method of John the Baptist. He strikes his finger on the sore spots of his age. He scores hypocrisy. He proclaims the doom which dogs the corrupt life. He announces a severe sifting and sorting. But that negative method does not work the miracle of transformation. His supreme service is that he sees the new power, the real dynamic in One greater than himself. "Behold!" he cries when he sees Jesus coming. "Look at him! Just see what is in that Person. I can insist on cleansing and purity, but he will baptize you with Spirit and fire." And the wonderful account says that "when they heard him speak, they followed Jesus." Of course they did. The result always happens. He saw and he made them see.

Another John, who quietly tells us that he has seen with his eyes and heard with his ears and handled with his hands the Word of life, who makes very evident that he has "received of his fulness grace piled upon grace," who has outwardly or inwardly lain "breast to breast with

who have had the trouble of looking after me), I have no lasting or serious regrets. I mean that tho, being human and a business man, I have my moments of envy and slight bitterness as I watch my former associates climbing the ladder high above me, I do not envy them in my hours of vision. I can not explain this feeling of all-right-ness, still less can I prove its truth. I can only say that I feel it, as the saying is, in my bones. It is a fundamental faith, beyond all logic. And, curiously enough, I am not keen on personal survival, tho I believe it to be a fact, and that it is necessary

to a rational faith. But I should still believe in the ultimate rightness of things, even if it were provable (which it is not) that personal survival is untrue. If my personality is to be merged at death in something greater—say, the general psychic life of the universe—I am content that it should be so. I still believe that that psychic life will somehow be the richer for the painful but educative discipline which I have undergone. I give myself over to that Being. In Dante's great line, "In his will is my peace"; not in my own will. "Tho he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

## CHRIST LAYING DOWN LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS<sup>1</sup> CONSIDERED FROM TWO POINTS OF VIEW

### I

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WHAT Christ intended to accomplish by his death has not been rightly interpreted in the creeds of Christendom.

On the evening before his crucifixion Christ address his disciples in a farewell discourse at the table where their earthly fellowship reached its goal. "Having loved his own who are in the world he loved them to the end." With these words his beloved disciple prefaces his record of his Master's declaration that he was to give the supreme demonstration of his love by laying down his life for his friends (John 15:13). This he did before another sunset. The sequel showed its need and intent right soon at Pentecost, when the effect of Peter's sermon verified his Master's promise that "greater works" than his should be achieved by the disciples for whom he was to lay down his life (John 14:12; Acts 2:37-47).

Until recently there has been no dissent in Evangelical churches from the creeds of the Protestant Reformation in their view of the need that Christ should die as he did. They teach that it was "to satisfy divine justice," as the sinner's substitute before the broken

law in bearing its curse for them. Luther's favorite epistle to the Galatians (3:13) gives the great "proof-text" for this view of the case.

Does it fit the case of the disciples to whom Jesus declared that he was about to lay down his life for them? This is a question which no one as yet has apparently raised. Expositors and Bible readers all seem to have assumed that Jesus' words in John 15:13 meant nothing else than what the creeds affirm, his death as the sinner's substitute, "the just for the unjust." But other sayings of our Lord in this farewell discourse have been overlooked, which by no means square well with that belief, but actually discard it in the case of the disciples he was addressing as the friends for whom he was about to die.

The facts clearly outstanding on the face of the record are these: During the three years since he bade them, "Follow me," they had loyally stood by him in service and under his trials, and had been given honorable rank in his kingdom (Luke 22:28-30). He now pronounced them "bathed" and "clean" (John 13:10, R. V.; compare Titus 3:5). More specifically he went on to say that his words of truth and life had cleansed them

<sup>1</sup>The first article in this series appeared in the number for January, 1917, the second in the number for April. In this paper, and others to follow, address especially to all who accept the Christian Scriptures as authentic and authoritative throughout, modern critical questions are purposely waived.

with regenerating effect (John 15:3; compare 1 Peter 1:22, 23). He also commissioned them to bear witness for him before the world as coworkers with the Spirit of truth (John 15:26, 27). Meanwhile the Spirit was to guide them into all the truth (John 16:13), and the truth which had regenerated them was to carry on their sanctification to completeness (John 17:17, 19). Finally, all these sayings were sublimely sealed with this declaration: "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). An absolutely unconditioned gift was this. Can any one intent on reality fail to see here a clear exception to the doctrine of a favorite hymn? "He died that we might be forgiven." Through all the sayings that come to this sublime climax what faintest hint of any such idea as that of the creeds, that it was still needful that Christ should lay down his life for these friends to "satisfy divine justice" in forgiving their sins?

The sayings of our Lord above cited seem to have remained hidden in their real meaning. The present writer was long prepossessed and blinded by the creeds' interpretation of the need that Christ should die for his friends. All who regard the gospel which embalms them as genuinely apostolic and authoritative must admit that they exhibit in the case of the friends to whom Christ address them a clear exception to the creed statements that Christ must die for every man in order that God might justly forgive the penitent.

Confusion of thought has been caused by our translators in frequently substituting "justice" and "just" for righteousness and righteous—terms which the Greek (*dikaionē* and *dikaos*) uniformly applies to God and godly men. Justice, rendering to every one his due, is a legal term. Righteousness, distinctively a moral term, transcends justice. Justice contrasts with mercy; righteousness is merciful, and mercy is prone to forgive. "Translators are traitors," is an Italian proverb.

There are only two conceivable ways to the forgiveness of sinners by the Holy One—an adequate punishment or an adequate repentance. Christian theologians have insisted on the former, conceiving of sin against infinite goodness as an infinite sin, expiable only by an infinite sacrifice of God incarnated as the sinners' substitute. But

is it not juggling with words to talk of a finite being committing infinite sin, and capable of suffering infinite punishment in eternity because unable to offer an infinite sacrifice? If this be not clear enough, the fact is on the face of the gospel record that the friends our Lord address stood in no need of any further sacrifice for sin than they had offered by repentance unto righteousness, and would continue to offer in the living sacrifice of body and spirit to the great cause for which he laid down his life, namely, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

In this logical connection sayings of Christ into which a different meaning has been read yield their true meaning. "The son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The moral and historical truth of these words has been generally overlooked. Interpreters prepossessed with the idea that Christ died to satisfy divine justice have isolated the word "ransom" from its preceding context, and so have read into it its present ordinary meaning, the release of a captive or prisoner by giving satisfaction to the lawful claimant. No thoughtful reader of the Evangelists can be blind to two facts. Christ's entire ministry was a giving of his life to redeem sinners from bondage to their sins. Daily did he thus "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). Hear him say to the penitent grafter Zacchæus publicly renouncing his sinful life: "To-day is salvation come to this house." The crowning act of such a life was his laying it down on Calvary. And when within the next fifteen years we see the multitudes won to him by Peter and Paul, when we read Pliny's report to the Emperor, ere eighty years had passed, of "an incredible multitude" deserting the temples, worshiping "Christus as a god," and binding themselves by "a sacrament" to lead upright lives, two conclusions seem inevitable. It was to empower his friends to win such victories for him that he laid down his life for them. "I have overcome (literally, have conquered) the world," was his last word to them at the Table. With perfect truth Earl Nelson wrote:

"Thou, Lord, didst win the battle  
That they might conquerors be."

The simple terms on which he declared them clean, and sharers of his glory, were the terms on which he acknowledged their converts as his own.

Both the primitive and the modern missionary triumphs of his gospel of repentance and forgiveness illuminate his other saying, when giving the cup at the Table: "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many" (Mark 14:24 R. V.). The words added by Matthew, "unto the remission of sins," need no further comment than has already been made.

In what sense then, one may still ask, did the beloved disciple who recorded his Master's last conversation with his friends regard him as "the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1)? It depends on whether our idea of God is Biblical, or that of creeds not always Biblical. The Biblical idea is that God both dwells in man and reigns on high; the creeds conceive of him as reigning above in separation from man. God has not estranged himself from sinful man; sinful man has estranged himself from God. Awakened to self-condemnation he feels the need of propitiating offended Deity. His plea is simply Christ—not as dying centuries ago, but as living in his contrite heart, and making him, said Paul, "a man in Christ." In this oneness of will with God in Christ is accomplished what God demands—not the punishment of sin, but its effective condemnation.<sup>2</sup> "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1-4).

"In Christ," and Christ also in his real disciples, as he said: "I in them, and thou in me," and as Paul said: "Christ liveth in me." Are they in Christ who substitute for this vital bond the legal bond supposed to be created by simply "accepting Christ" as the surety who has "paid all I owe"? Is there not in many a church member a perceptible antinomianism consequent on this?

Our interpretation of John's idea of the propitiation is borne out by what the martyred Ignatius, a younger contemporary of John, wrote of the cleansing blood (1 John 1:7): "The blood of Christ is love or charity." "Not by blood but by piety is God appeased," was a maxim of some of the Latin Fathers.<sup>3</sup> Said David Livingstone in his

<sup>2</sup> "The real atonement is man and God reciprocally active in judgment" (Principal P. T. Forsyth).

<sup>3</sup> See Stanley's *Christian Institutions*, chap. vi 8, American edition.

last days, "What is the blood of Christ? It is himself." It must not be overlooked that the too often quoted saying, "Apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22), explicitly refers to the Mosaic sacrifices.

Finally, the actual intent with which Christ laid down his life, tho clearly a legitimate inference from its immediate and present historical consequences, is more convincingly attested than by these which have demonstrated its need. His own words, too commonly overlooked, declare both his purpose and its accomplishment. He found himself, tho followed by multitudes, proscribed and marked for death by the religious authorities. His cause being thus to all appearance lost, he saw but one way in such a strait to win it. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). His martyrs during the next three centuries understood his word, and called their deaths for his cause their "blood-baptism." About ten days before his death he repeated that word to James and John (Mark 10:38-40). On his last Sunday he foretold that by death he should draw the world to himself (John 12:31-33). In Gethsemane, having assured himself by an hour of intense prayer that he had not erred in believing that only by the painful death from which his sensitive soul recoiled (Matt. 26:38) he should finally accomplish the Father's will, he "went forth" to accomplish it by surrender to foes he could have easily eluded (John 18:4-8). John has preserved the cry of victory with which he died, "It has been accomplished"—his very word months before when announcing his great resolve. Our translators have diluted the emphatic perfect tense of the Greek into the less expressive, and actually ambiguous, "It is finished."

Died he thus as a victim, or as a victorious warrior? What could the few on whose constancy he relied have ever become, had he lived till overtaken by a natural death, but a feeble sect dying out in course of time? How could his "mustard-seed" have so soon become, as in his parable, "a tree," its branches the home of multitudes of souls, the world-girdling religion it is to-day, had he not laid down his life for his friends, that they in his spirit might make it such? Wildly improbable it is that those few could otherwise have done the "greater works"

than his, promised "because I go to the Father," and went in the way he chose to go.<sup>4</sup>

## II

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It is an exegetical crime to make John 15:13—"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"—refer to the death of Christ. It is to wrench it out of its connection, and give to it a meaning which the speaker never put into it.

It is a quotation from our Lord's address at the first communion-table. He was speaking to the eleven apostles. Among other things, he was urging them—and through them, all Christians—to be loyal to him and devoted to one another. In that connection he made the general observation that the highest exhibition of loyal love was for a man to lay down his life for his friends. They, and all Christians, are his "friends," and friends one of another. Therefore they ought to be faithful to him and to one another, even unto death—if necessary. He is, consequently, speaking about their dying for him, and not about his dying for them.

Hence all doctrinal inferences about the nature of the atonement—about men being the "friends" of Christ prior to his laying down his life for them—about his dying for them because they were his "friends"—about his laying down his life for them unloosing their friendship for him for all manner of victories and triumphant things—about its enabling him to win the world through them—about a sin-burdened conscience being the altar upon which he laid down his life, the shrine where he worships

<sup>4</sup>The awful misinterpretation commonly put on the loud cry shouted by Jesus in his last moments, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" is utterly incredible. These words are the first line of Psalm 22. That psalm is not a wail of despair, but a song of ascent from the depths to the heights of joyous deliverance. This is plain to any one who reads it through. Do we not often recall a favorite hymn entire by quoting its first line? Undoubtedly so did Jesus. During six hours he had hung upon the cross in silence. How unbelievable that when he felt himself about to be released by death he could have shouted the first line of that psalm for any other reason than is plain to us in its triumphant second half. This is the only thought consistent with his immediately following words, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). The dreadful meanings read into that "loud cry" by blind interpreters make this the capital case of the frequent neglect of Bengel's caution: "Suffer nothing to remain hidden that is in Scripture."

—anything, everything, about the atonement got out of this text, is first lugged into it bodily, and forced upon it without the speaker's consent. It is an exegetical crime. It simply teaches nothing at all about the atonement. It says nothing more than for one friend to die for another is the very highest act of friendship.

A man may give his life for his friends, as Pythias did for Damon; but the very uniqueness and wonder in the story of Christ are that he laid down his life for those with whom neither he nor his Father was on good terms. "Christ died for the ungodly . . . while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:6-8). None are his friends who do not keep his commandments (John 15:14).

There is just one place in all the Scripture where Christ represents his death as laying down his life, John 10:15-18:

"And I lay down my life for the sheep . . . Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I of my Father."

His act was voluntary. He laid down his own life. No man took it from him. On the cross he gave up the ghost—dismissed his human spirit. It was a free-will offering, a voluntary sacrifice, made to his Father, and made for his sheep.

He was not a suicide. He was acting under divine authority—doing what he had the "power," or right, to do. He had received such a "commandment" from his Father. It was all according to the plan, purpose, decree of God. Hence it was the sublimest act of worship in the annals of time or records of eternity. Himself the priest, himself the victim—his life was the pious sacrifice which he laid upon the altar of God.

Christ also raised himself from the dead. He took up the life which he laid down. He was the agent in his own resurrection. He must have been an exceptional sort of person. A mere man might lay down his life, but no mere man could take it up again. To dismiss his human spirit from his body, and then call it back again, he must have been a divine-human being: human—to lay it down; divine—to take it up again.

He laid down his life at the feet of his Father—a votive offering to God. He did

not offer it to man. It pleased God, and was accepted by him. "Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again." It gave him a lofty place in his Father's heart.

John mentions just three things which God loves—his "world" (John 3:16), "his own" (John 13:1), his "Son" (John 10:17). But why does he love Christ? Because he was his Son? No. Because he was saintly? No. Because he was benevolent? No. All these are facts, but they are not assigned as the facts which gave him his standing in the friendship and love of his Father. "Ye are my friends—If ye keep my commandments. And I am God's friend—because I have kept his commandment. This is the commandment which he gave me—lay down your life, and then take it again. I have obeyed that commandment. Therefore doth the Father love me."

Prior to the act of laying down his life and taking it again, the Father was dis-pleasant toward him. Providence had dealt with him bitterly. On Calvary, in his dying hour, he had wailed, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" And why has his Father been displeased with him? Because he was an alien? No. Because he was personally wicked and unlovely? No. Yet he had to lay down his life to get his standing in his Father's affections! Will anything approximate an explanation but the historic doctrine of imputed sin? This transaction must have commended him to his Father, not in some private and personal relation, but in some public and representative character, sustained to the beneficiaries of his deed.

His act of laying down his life and taking it again terminated upon his Father, and placated him toward the Shepherd with his sheep. This is the exact figure of the context. The Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep—makes common cause with them. The result: the imputed sin of the Shepherd and the actual sin of the sheep is expiated, and the Father is propitiated toward the Shepherd and his sheep—he in them and they in him, bound up together in a common bundle in the Calvary transaction.

The Scriptures assert that the Father had a positive agency in the death of his Son. "For of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were

gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel foreordained to come to pass" (Acts 4:27, 28). This reads like the verdict of a coroner's jury. According to it, Jesus laid down his life under the decree of the Roman government, the decree of the Jewish sanhedrin, and the decree of Almighty God—three concurrent decrees.

The Romans found him innocent, but sentenced him to death for political reasons. The Jews found him innocent, but sentenced him to death for ecclesiastical reasons. God found him innocent, but sentenced him to death on account of the offending of somebody else. The Christian expositor must vindicate the action of God in this matter.

To explain his Father's attitude and action toward him, we need the familiar distinction between emotional wrath and judicial wrath. The magistrate is the "minister of wrath" (Rom. 13:4), but he feels no emotional anger toward the criminal whom he sentences. So God the Father did love his Son at the very instant he visited punitive consequences upon him. In laying down his life, under the divine decree, he expiated imputed guilt and procured the judicial friendship of his Father for him and for his "sheep." "Therefore doth the Father love me."

"The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for ( $\delta\upsilon\tau\iota$ ) many" (Matt. 20:28). "This is my body which is given for ( $\delta\upsilon\tau\iota$ ) you" (Mark 10:45).  $\delta\upsilon\tau\iota$  never did mean anything but "instead of." It is easy to forgive, when a sufficient reason has been established—a vicarious, expiatory atonement has been made.

"Reconciliation" is the heart of the gospel, and any interpreter's soteriology depends upon his conception of what those things are which are to be "reconciled."

Is it persons and things—man and his world? Then the need is for a secular gospel. Is man on bad terms with himself, needing self-reconciliation? Then the desideratum is an ethical gospel. Is he out of joint with society, so that he needs to be harmonized with his fellow men? Then it is a sociological gospel which is called for. Is it reconciliation with the Church, or his Christian community, which is the first and fundamental need? Then give him an ecclesiastical gospel. Is it two abstract natures, divinity and humanity, which need to be brought together? Then the supreme de-

sideratum is a metaphysical gospel. Is it God and man, two persons, who are estranged from each other because sin separates between them? Then the need is for an evangelical gospel—one which will propitiate God by expiating the sin that is between them.

By laying down his life and taking it again, Christ secured the love and friendship of God. By the gift of his Spirit, subjectively changing the hearts of men, he converts the enmity of men into friendship for God. He propitiates God by his atonement; he propitiates men by converting them by his Spirit. It is a perfect friendship when God is satisfied with men, and men are satisfied with God. It is Christ,

who, by his atoning death, satisfies God; and it is the spirit, who, by his converting grace, satisfies the sinner with God. There may be such a thing as vicarious obedience, but there can be no such thing as vicarious repentance.

Is God estranged from man? Then man needs conversion. Is it sin that separates and breaks up the friendship between the two? Then it needs expiation. Then the divine wrath (*ὀργή*) becomes a divine love (*ἀγάπη*) not because God has changed, but because facts have changed.

God loves his Son because he laid down his life for the sheep; he loves the sheep because the Shepherd laid down his life for them.

## PROGRESS OF THE WAR IN EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

Mar. 8.—Germans are driven from the trenches on the Champagne front captured by them from the French in February.

11.—British take Bagdad, and occupy Kazimain, five miles further up the Tigris. On the Somme front they take the village of Irlles, with 300 prisoners and 16 machine guns.

12.—French capture height 185 on Champagne front, with 100 prisoners.

13.—Berlin announces capture of 570 Russians and 13 machine guns in Galicia. Germans abandon trenches on three-mile front west of Bapaume.

14.—China severs diplomatic relations with Germany. Russians occupy Kermanshah in Persia, driving Turks before them.

15.—British gain two and one-half miles of trenches southeast of Bapaume; also advance 1,000 yards on two-mile front in Macedonia.

17.—*Zeppelin L-39* is destroyed forty-five miles from Paris. German raiding squadron sink a British destroyer and a merchant vessel in the English Channel. British-French forces occupy Le Transloy, Grand and Petit Achiet-le-Grand, and Roye.

18.—Germans retreat in France along eighty-five-mile front, yielding towns of Péronne, Chaulnes, Nesle, and Noyon (nearest point to Paris on German lines), and over sixty villages. Germans destroy villages and orchards behind them and poison well with arsenic. Russians take town of Van, Armenia, and occupy Baneh, in Persia, near the Turkish border. German submarines sink three American steamships, costing several American lives.

19.—Entente forces occupy nearly 500 square

miles of territory vacated by Germans on Somme front, including towns of Ailette, Chauny, Ham, Bertincourt, and Boisleux. British occupy Bahriz and Bukabah on the Tigris; Russians reach Harunabad in Persia. Arabs isolate a Turkish force at Aden. French battleship *Danton* torpedoed in the Mediterranean with loss of 296 lives, 806 persons were saved.

20.—French capture two towns and a hill, with 1,200 prisoners and 11 machine guns, north of Monastir, Macedonia.

21.—President Wilson calls special session of Congress for April 2.

22.—German submarine sinks American tankship *Healdton*, with loss of twenty-one men, outside "submarine zone."

24.—French take outside forts south of Le Fère, and British occupy Roisel, cutting line from Cambrai to St. Quentin.

25.—French take Castres, Essigny-le-Grand, and Hill 121.

26.—French capture Folembray and La Feuillée, and held other parts of the line against counter-attacks. British take Lagnicourt, six miles northwest of Bapaume.

29.—British defeat large Turkish force near Gaza in Palestine, inflicting over 8,000 casualties and taking more than 950 prisoners, including the 53d Ottoman divisional staff.

30.—British advance one mile on a three-mile front toward Cambrai.

Apr. 2.—British gain on front of twelve miles between Arras and St. Quentin, capturing twelve villages. The President addresses joint session of Congress on declaring a state of war against Germany.

<sup>1</sup> We will continue this digest till the end of the war.