

Why Did Christ Die?

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The Present Truth : September 21, 1893

The fact that this question has been asked in all seriousness by an active Christian is sufficient reason for considering it, apart from the fact that it touches the very core of Christianity. It shows that the fundamental principles of the Gospel are not so generally understood, as people are wont to imagine. This is not because they are so obscure and complex as to be beyond ordinary comprehension, but because they have been so thickly enveloped in the fog of theological terms. Those terms are the invention of men, and have nothing to do with the Scriptures. If we are content with the simple statements of the Bible, we shall see how quickly its light dispels the fog of theological speculation.

“Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). That is a sufficient answer, but we will read further. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). “Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Read again: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:6-10).

Once more: “And you, that were sometime enemies, and alienated in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight” (Col. 1:21, 22). “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:17-19).

All men have sinned. (Rom. 3:23). Sin is enmity against God. “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). In one of the texts above quoted we read that men need reconciliation, because they are enemies in their minds by wicked works. Therefore since all men have sinned, it follows that all men are by nature the enemies of God; and that also is what we read in Rom. 5:10, above quoted.

But sin is death. “To be carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6). “By one man sin came into the world, and death by sin” (Rom. 5:12). Death came in by sin, because it carries

death concealed within it. “The sting of death is sin” (1 Cor. 15:56). Sin when it is full grown brings forth death. (James 1:15).

Sin is death, for the reason that it is enmity against God. God is “the living God.” With Him is “the fountain of life” (Ps. 36:9). Christ is called the “Author of life” (Acts 3:15), margin. Life is the grand characteristic of God. “He gives to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). “In Him we live, and move, and have are being;” “for we are also His offspring” (Acts 17:28). The life of God is the source of every created thing; and apart from Him there can be no life.

But righteousness, as well as life, is the grand characteristic of God. “There is no unrighteousness in Him” (Ps. 92:15). “As for God, His way is perfect” (Ps. 18:30). Since the life of God is the source of all life, and all depend on Him, it follows that His righteousness is the standard of righteousness of all intelligent beings; for God’s life is nothing but righteousness. Therefore life and righteousness are inseparable. “To be spiritually minded is life” (Rom. 8:6).

Now since God’s life is the standard of righteousness, it is evident that everything that is different from the life of God is unrighteousness; and “all unrighteousness is sin.” But if the life of any being is different from the life of God, it must be because His life is not allowed free course through that being. But where God’s life is not, there is death. Whoever is out of harmony with God—enmity against Him—has death working in him, and death for his inevitable portion. So it is not by an arbitrary decree that the wages of sin is death. That results from the very nature of things. Sin is opposition to God, —rebellion against Him, —and is utterly foreign to His being. It is separation from God, and separation from God is death, because there is no life outside of Him. All that hate Him, love death.

Let us now sum up the case of the relation between the natural man and God. **(1)** All have sinned. **(2)** Sin is enmity against God; it is rebellion. **(3)** Sin is alienation from God; men are alienated and enemies in their minds by wicked works. (Col. 1:21). **(4)** Sinners are “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18). But God in Christ is the only source of life for the universe, and therefore all who are thus alienated from His righteous life are by the very nature of things doomed to death. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12).

Reconciliation

From all that has preceded it is very evident that the only object that Christ could have in coming to earth and dying for men was the reconciliation of man to God, so that he might have life. “I am come that they might have life” (John 10:10). “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight” (Col. 1:21, 22). Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, “that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). “If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” Rom. 5:10).

“But,” someone will say, “You have made the reconciliation all on the part of men; I have always been taught that the death of Christ reconciled God to man; that Christ died to satisfy God’s justice, and to appease Him.” Well, we have left the matter of reconciliation just where the Scriptures have put it; and while they have much to say about the necessity for man to be reconciled to God, they never once hint of such a thing as the necessity for God to be reconciled to man. To intimate the necessity for such a thing is to bring a grave charge against the character of God. The idea has come into the Christian Church from the Papacy, which in turn brought it from Paganism, in which the only idea of God was of a being whose wrath must be appeased by a sacrifice.

Stop a moment, and think what reconciliation means. The existence of enmity is the only necessity for reconciliation. Where there is no enmity, there is no necessity for reconciliation. Man is by nature alienated from God; he is a rebel, full of enmity. Therefore man needs to be reconciled—to have his enmity taken away. But God has no enmity in His being. “God is love.” Consequently there is no necessity for Him to be reconciled; there is no possibility of such a thing, for there can be no reconciliation where there has been no enmity.

Again: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Surely, they who say that the death of Christ reconciled God to men have forgotten this blessed text. They would separate the Father and the Son, making the former the enemy, and the latter the friend, of man. But God’s heart was so overflowing with love to fallen man, that He “spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all;” and in so doing He gave Himself, for “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” The Apostle Paul speaks of “the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 10:28). This effectually disposes of the idea that there was any enmity toward man on the part of God, so that He needed to be reconciled. The death of Christ was the expression of God’s wonderful love for sinners.

Consider further what reconciliation means. It means a change on the part of the one reconciled. If one has enmity in His heart towards another, a radical change must take place in him before he is reconciled. This is the case with man. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17, 18). But to speak of the necessity for God to be reconciled to man, is not only to say that He cherished enmity in His heart, but to say that God was partially in the wrong, and that a change had to take place in Him as well as in man. If it were not in the innocence of ignorance that men talked about God’s having been reconciled to men, it would be blasphemy. That is one of the “great things and blasphemies” that the Papacy has spoken against God. Let us not echo it.

God is. He could not be other than He is, and be God. He is absolute and unchangeable perfection. He cannot change. Hear Him: “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Mal. 3:6). Instead of having to change and be reconciled to sinful man, in order that they might be saved, the only hope for their salvation is the

fact that he never changes, but is everlasting love. He is the source of life, and the standard of life. When any beings are unlike Him, the difference is on their part, and not on His. He is the fixed standard, to which all must conform, if they would live. God cannot change to accommodate the desires of sinful men, but simply because such a change would lower His dignity, and make His Government unstable, but because He cannot be other than He is, "He that cometh to God must believe that He is."

Just a thought concerning the idea that Christ's death was necessary to satisfy outraged justice. Christ death was necessary to satisfy the love of God. "God demonstrates His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Justice would have been met by the summary death of the sinful race. But God's love could not suffer that. So we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Through faith in His blood, God's righteousness—which is His life—is declared upon us, and thus He is just, and at the same time the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21-26). The reason why it was necessary that Christ should die, in order that men might be saved, will be considered in the next edition of this article.

Why have we dwelt so long upon the fact that man must be reconciled to God, and not God to man? Because in that alone is man's hope. If God ever had any enmity in His heart against men, there would always arise the torturing thought, "Perhaps He is not yet sufficiently appeased to accept Me; surely He cannot love so guilty a being as I am." And the more one realized his guilt, the greater would be his doubt. But when we know that God never had any enmity towards us, but that He has loved us with an everlasting love, and that He has loved us so much that He gave Himself for us, that we might be reconciled to Him, we can joyfully exclaim, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Remission

Freedom from sin, or at least from its consequences, is what men have been seeking ever since the fall. Sad to say, however, the great majority has sought it in the wrong way. It was with a lie against the character of God, that Satan caused the first sin, and he has been vigorously engaged in trying to induce people to believe that lie ever since. So successful has he been, that the mass of mankind regard God as stern and unsympathetic, a being that regards man with a coldly critical eye, and who would much rather destroy than save. In short, Satan has largely succeeded in putting himself in the place of God, in the minds of men.

Thus it is that much of the worship of the heathen is, and always has been, devil-worship. "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:20). Consequently all heathen worship springs from the idea that a sacrifice must be made to appease the wrath of their God. Sometimes this sacrifice is in the shape of property, but often it is of the person. Thus arose the great hordes of monks and hermits among the heathen, and later among the professed Christians, who borrowed their ideas of God from the heathen. These thought to gain the favor of God by scourging and torturing themselves.

The prophets of Baal cut themselves with knives, “till the blood gushed out upon them” (1 Kin. 18:28), hoping thereby to induce their god to listen to them. With the same idea of God, thousands of so-called Christians have worn hair shirts, walked barefoot on glass, made pilgrimages on their knees, slept on the hard floor, or the ground, and scourged themselves with thorns, starved themselves nearly to death, and set themselves the most impossible tasks. But nobody ever found peace in any of those ways, because *no man can get out of himself that which is not in him, and righteousness and peace are not in man.*

Sometimes this idea of propitiating the wrath of God has taken an easier form, —that is, easier for the worshippers. Instead of sacrificing themselves, they have sacrificed others. Human sacrifices have always been to a greater or lesser extent connected with heathenism. Men shudder as they read of the human sacrifices offered by the ancient inhabitants of Mexico and Peru, and by the Druids; but professed (not real) Christianity has its awful list. Even so-called Christian England has made hundreds of burnt offerings of men, for the purpose of turning away the wrath of God from the country. *Wherever there is religious persecution to any degree, it springs from the mistaken idea that God demands a victim.* This is shown by the words of Christ to His disciples: “The time cometh, that whosoever kills you will think that he offers God service” (John 16:2). All such worship has been devil worship, and not worship of the true God.

Just here somebody has remembered that it is said in Hebrews 9:22, “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission;” and this makes him think that after all God did demand a sacrifice before He would pardon man. It is very difficult for the mind to rid itself of the idea received as a legacy from Paganism, through the Papacy, that God was so angry at man for having sinned, that He could not be mollified without seeing blood flow, but that it made no difference to Him whose blood it was, if only somebody was killed; and that since Christ’s life was worth more than the lives of all men, He accepted Him as a substitute for them. This is almost a brutal way of stating the case, but it is the only way that the case can be truly presented. The heathen conception of God is a brutal one, as dishonoring to God as it is discouraging to man; and this heathen idea has been allowed to color too many texts of Scripture. It is sad to think how greatly men who really loved the Lord, have given occasion to His enemies to blaspheme.

“Apart from shedding of blood there is no remission.” What is remission? It means simply “sending away.” What is to be remitted, or sent away? Our sins, for we read that “through faith in Christ’s blood the righteousness of God is declared for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25). So we learn that apart from the shedding of blood there is no sending away of sins.

What blood is it that takes away sins? Only the blood of Christ, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” “Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:5). “Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver and gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18, 19). “If we

walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

But how is it that the shedding of blood, even the blood of Christ, can take away sins? Simply because the blood is the life. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11). So when we read that apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission, we know it means that no sins can be taken away except by the life of Christ. In Him is no sin; therefore when He imparts His life to a soul, that soul is at once cleansed from sin.

Remember that Christ is God. “The Word was God,” “and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” God gave Himself in Christ for men, for we have read of “the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.” The Son of man, in whom was the life of God, came to minister, “and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

The case, therefore, stands thus: All have sinned. Sin is enmity against God, because it is a condition of alienation from the life of God. Therefore sin is death. The one thing, then, that man stood in need of was life, and this is the one thing that Christ came to give. In Him was life that sin could not touch, and that could triumph over death. His life is the light of men. A single light may make ten thousand other lights, and still not be diminished. No matter how much sunlight any person receives, there is just as much for everybody else; and if there were a hundred times as many people on earth as there are, there would be no less sunlight for each one than there is now. So with the Sun of Righteousness - He can give His life to all, and still have as much left.

Christ came to impart the life of God to man, for it is that that they lack. The lives of all the angels in heaven could not have met the demands of the case; not because God was so inexorable, but because they could not have imparted any life to man. They had no life in themselves, but only the life that Christ imparted to them. But God was in Christ, and in Him God’s everlasting life could be given to everyone who would receive it. Remember that in giving His Son, God gave Himself, and you will see that a sacrifice was not demanded to satisfy God’s outraged feelings, but that, on the contrary, God’s inexpressible love led Him to sacrifice Himself, in order to break down man’s enmity, and reconcile us to Himself.

“But why could He not give us His life without dying?” That is to say, “Why could He not give us His life, and still not give it?” We needed life, and Christ alone had life to give; but the giving of life is dying. His death reconciles us to God, provided we make it our own by faith. We are reconciled to God by the death of Christ, because in dying He gave up His life, and He gave it to us. Being made partakers of the life of God, through faith in Christ’s death, *we are at peace with Him, because one life is in us both*. Then we are “saved by His life.” Christ died, but He still lives, and His life in us keeps us united to God. *The imparting of His life to us frees us from sin and the continuing of it in us, keeps us from sin.*

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Jesus said, “I am the light of the world; he that follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Now we can understand how it is that if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” His light is His life; walking in the light is walking in His life; and when we thus walk, His life is flowing through us, a living stream, cleanses from all sin.” “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” His life is light, and will dispel all earth’s darkness. In His light (life) we shall see light. Only as we consider hard questions in the light of His life, can we understand them.

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:31, 32)? Let the weak and fearful sinner take courage, and trust in the Lord. We have not a God who demands a sacrifice from man, but one who in His love has offered Himself a sacrifice. We owe to God a life perfectly in harmony with His law; but since our life is just the opposite of that, God in Christ has substituted His own life for ours, and so we can offer up “spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Then “let Israel hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Ps. 130:7, 8).