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The redemptive value of the incarnation

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SENIOR THESIS.

THE REDEMPTIVE VALUE OF THE INCARNATION.

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CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION	p 1.
CHAPTER I.	
THE INCARNATION AS THE SELF-EXPRESSION OF GOD'S NATURE AND PURPOSE.	p 3.
CHAPTER II.	
THE INCARNATION AS A REVELATION OF SIN.	p 7.
CHAPTER III.	
THE INCARNATION AS THE REVELATION OF THE PERFECT MAN, AND THE WAY THROUGH WHICH THIS COMPLETED MANHOOD IS ATTAINABLE.	p 11.
CHAPTER IV.	
CONCLUSIONS.	p 18.

THE REDEEMPTIVE VALUE OF THE INCARNATION.

INTRODUCTION.

That the Incarnation has very great significance for the redemption of mankind may be readily believed from its close relation to this theme in the New Testament. Upon almost every page the New Testament places the Incarnate Christ along side of sinful man as the only full and sufficient means of his salvation. Says James Orr, "The Incarnation in scripture is always brought into immediate connection with sin, and with the purpose of God in Redemption". "He was manifested to take away sins", says the Apostle John. With this agree all the writers of the New Testament. By everything that Christ ever said and did he was making manifest the holiness of God and the evil of sin. The Incarnation has, therefore, the highest practical value in the salvation of man. "It is consonant with the leading conception of God as holy love that in the enterprise of rescuing a race of sinners He should have chosen the method of the Incarnation. Hereby love was given: the

highest manifestation and the best opportunity to work
with victorious efficiency". (H.C. Sheldon, System of
Christian Doctrine, 325)

I CHAPTER.

THE INCARNATION AS THE SELF-EXPRESSION
OF GOD'S NATURE AND PURPOSE.

The Incarnation is being regarded by many today, as an immanent necessity in the love of God to self-expression. If man was created in the image of God, and his perfection was possible only in union with God, then an Incarnation of one who should enable man to consummate this union would seem to be necessary. Thus the Incarnation is conceived as being involved in the essential ethical relation of God to the world.

If it is God's purpose to save man through man's cooperation then it is necessary that man should know enough of the divine purpose to join with it in securing its end. Where such great interests are at stake surely God will make clear to man his purpose. God has made known his being in creation (Rom. 1:20). Nature tells us something of His power, majesty and regard for order. But it does not afford sufficient grounds to give us the knowledge of God's love and grace. For this additional revelation is needed. To know God as Father, he must be revealed in personal

relationships which are ethical and moral."If we searched all space we should discover only the gospel of power; if we surveyed all time, only the gospel of righteousness. Only in Jesus Christ do we learn the gospel of grace".(Luthardt).

The moral nature of God assures us that he has expressed his saving purpose in the clearest possible ways to men. "God is the most deeply moral being in the universe. The very righteousness of God demands that he do everything he can for the salvation of men. The God of the Incarnation does all that an eternal Father can do for man's salvation".

God has revealed himself to men in various ways and with different degrees of fulness. He has now spoken unto us in His Son(Heb.1:1-2). God speaks in persons rather than in abstract principles. His revelations are made in concrete forms. "He reveals himself not in words, but in things, events, or persons. In the Old Testament he did not teach faith by definition, but by Abraham; and in the New he teaches us holiness, righteousness and life, not by formula, but by Jesus Christ".(Dubose: Soteriology of the New Testament).

Moreover, God as personality could adequately express

himself in no other way except as a divine person.

Personality is the only realm that affords room for man's apprehension of the true nature of the Father. If man's heart is to go out in affection and love to God, the Father, it seems needful that he be revealed to man as a LOVING Father. This quality of the divine nature has been made manifest in Christ. God being such as Christ is, man is drawn to him with strong cords of love. For man can know and appreciate the noble qualities of love and grace as they are seen in the person of Christ. Thus mutual love is awakened. "We love him because he first loved us". (John)

"I came not to save the righteous but sinners", said Jesus. This truth lies at the very heart of the Gospel. Man as he is to be is the goal of the spiritual creation. The spiritual destination of man is the full significance of the Incarnation. Christ himself presents the goal of holy character. We very heartily repudiate the idea that he is a mere example or a mere objective standard or law to us. But that does not mean that he is not an example and law to us, however much more he may be. The Incarnate Christ is to man the revelation of the divine idea as to what God would

have man become. The first step in the recreation of humanity must be the exhibition of a true pattern of manhood in a life perfectly well pleasing to the Father. That we have such a pattern in Christ is the undivided verdict of the New Testament. They agree with the "voice out of the cloud" on the mount of transfiguration, when it said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him".

II CHAPTER.

THE INCARNATION AS A REVELATION OF SIN.

The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ made clear to men, as nothing else could have done, the judgment of God upon sin. Sin can be no longer merely the transgression of an abstract principle, but a direct affront to the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to secure man's co-operation with God in destroying sin in his nature, man must come to the same judgment which God holds with regard to sin. If to God sin is hateful man must come to hate it. If God cannot tolerate it, man must come to regard it with abhorrence.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength", carries with it the implication that man is to love deeply all that God loves. It also implies that man is to regard with aversion and hatred all that is an offence unto God. Paul makes this a specific duty in Rom. 12:9. "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is Good". We therefore conclude that God's hatred to sin must become man's judgment regarding it. How can this be?

The Incarnation in Christ reveals to man God's

attitude toward sin. God wishes to rid the world of it through man's co-operation. Matt. 1:21 records that the Lord spake to Joseph regarding the name of the unborn child, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins". Jesus when in his active work said, "I came not to call the righteous but sinners". This is the divine purpose. But man must have awakened in his heart a sense of the awfulness of sin. In this relation we need the expression of God's nature with regard to sin, in the Incarnation. This makes its hatefulness manifest as nothing else could have done. This makes clear the deep antagonism of sin against good. "And this is the judgment that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil". (John 3:19). "In Christ love and righteousness were Incarnate; though hated he always loved; though wronged, he always obeyed. In him there was nothing akin to evil, or anything that sin could call its own. But this only made two things the more manifest, the hatefulness of sin to the good, and the hate of sin for the good. In the very degree that Christ's soul was

pure; He was sensitive to the shame of evil; its very shadow was to Him misery; and it is a thing man cannot forget that the Sinless bears as His distinguishing name "the Man of Sorrows". But this purity of His was the very thing sin could not forgive; it saw Him only to feel, "Here is a sacrifice I must offer". It offered him without shame on its own part but with such feeling and shrinking on His that he prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass". But it could not be allowed to pass, for it was necessary to the saving of man that the inmost essence of sin should be revealed". (The Place of Christ in Modern Theology". p 485. Fairbairn).

Here then in the Incarnation we see sin revealed in all its malignity and despicable hatefulness. Men see its vileness and it awakens repulsion in their hearts. They can no longer look upon sin with calm feelings. It touches the deep currents of human emotion, and hatred of evil springs up. Men long to be free from its destroying influence. They come to regard it with abhorrence as does God, the Father. "His death in itself was the most awful tragedy of history. It was so as the unspeakably wicked

requital by men of the supreme benefactor of mankind. And men come to feel that in the death of Christ there is the most awful revelation of the consequences of sinⁿ. (Lidgett. The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement, p 274) The study of the passion is forevermore the remedy for light and easy thoughts of sin.

III CHAPTER.

THE INCARNATION AS THE REVELATION OF THE
PERFECT MAN, AND THE WAY THROUGH WHICH THIS
COMPLETED MANHOOD IS ATTAINABLE.

God does not make men good in the same way as he makes flowers beautiful. The rose may be perfect but if so it is because its nature is such that it cannot avoid coming to perfection. Physical or natural causation is always through the nature of things and independent of any principle of self-determination. It is not so in the development of man. As a moral being man must attain his goal through the co-operation of his whole nature. As a free being he has the power of choice, and moral character is attained through the right direction of this power. Spiritual causation seeks spiritual effects, because it operates upon subjects which are not merely physical but spiritual and personal. God can cause my holiness so as that I also shall be the cause of it. Holiness is a personal quality or character, one which is self-caused. In the development of christian character God works in complete harmony with the laws of the soul, setting in motion

all the elements of man's being. Thus God honors man's powers in this noble achievement. "Man is capable of knowing his ends and determining himself towards them". In the attainment of christian character man's will must be enlisted.

But before man can enlist his spiritual powers in the achievement of a goal he must have knowledge of what that goal is. Before he can strive toward perfect manhood, he must have set before him the perfect Man. Says Dubose: "If one is through his own understanding, will and free activity, i. e., through himself, to be made other than ~~what~~ he is, he must be shown that other which he is to become. It must be made to him an object and end of obligation, aspiration, imitation. It must appeal to, and move, influence and transform him through his reason, his affections, his conscious will". Now Christlikeness is the goal of human effort. He is the highest revelation of God as to what man is to become. To become like him in all things is the goal set before us. Jesus Christ is in himself as man what God would be in all men and would have all men be in him. "If ye will have a standard let it be God. "Be ye

perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect". Too high to be attainable do you say; too high to be even taken seriously? Nay, the loftiness of this moral ideal is its charm and its power. It is vulgar, low-pitched moral ideals that fail. They do not command respect; they make their appeal to the lower side of our nature; to self-interest and prudence; they lack the power to awaken enthusiasm in any human being. The lofty, unearthly ideal of Jesus Christ on the other hand makes its appeal distinctly, exclusively, and confidently to the heroic element that slumbers in every man. It speaks to us in words charged with subtle charm of poetry, or with the spirit-stirring power of military music. It arouses enthusiasm, it transforms timid men into brave soldiers ready to fight without thought of fear; it makes sinful men partakers of the divine nature, capable of morality Godlike in quality, if not perfect in degree. And wherein lies the personal power of the Lord Jesus to bind human hearts to Him in devoted love and heroic service? In this, that He realized His own ideal. He was indeed perfect as God is perfect, and in being this He left all his disciples, even such an one as St. Paul

hopelessly behind. But the divine loftiness of His character does not remove Him beyond reach of our sympathy. We do not lose interest ~~in~~ in him because he is so much better than we are. On the contrary, it is by his excellence, by the *ἡ ἀειπλοῦν* that he draws us. He is to our hearts, the imitable inimitable, holding us at once by aspiration and by admiration". ("With Open Face" Bruce 192.)

Christ sets before us in His life in the flesh the loftiest ethical, moral and religious attainments. But to view him simply as an example would be to do great injustice to his claims and to his nature. He declared, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life". "Jesus Christ is not only our example, but through His example He causes and becomes, in us, that of which He is the example". (Dubose .p 133.) Jesus realized here in our world the moral and spiritual ideal of human perfection. This is an amazing fact and has high saving significance: "A purity like this could not come into our world without purifying. Such a life does not fail to reveal to men their sins; nor does it fail to honor and exalt the divine holiness and show that the sinner cannot be blessed in his sins". "It is Christ himself, and no

single deed or experience; that is the full power of God unto salvation". (Stevens: "The Christian Doctrine of Salvation". p 364.) Says Hodge, "The Incarnation itself, the union of the Divine and human natures, was the great saving act. Christ redeems us by what He is, not by what He does". (Systematic Theology. Vol. 2 p585.) Athanasius said in his De Incarnatione, "The Son of God became what we are, that we might become what God is". "It is the teaching of both Paul and John, and of Christian theology in general, that the eternal Son is the ideal of all Sonship and the means of its realization in us all". (Walker: The Spirit and the Incarnation.) Christ, therefore, realized the life of perfect union with God, His earthly life was an unbroken fellowship with the Father. In him we behold humanity in perfect union with God. Thus the redeeming power of Christ's life has been known and experienced through all the Christian ages. Says Dr. H.C. Sheldon, "Viewed as to its practical import, Christ's sinless humanity must be regarded as the choicest and most significant of miracles. To men who know the desperate tenacity of sin, and long for deliverance, the vision of one who was tempted, but yet with-

out sin, is a perennial source of inspiration and hope. It illustrates and enforces, as nothing else can, the idea of a possible glorification of human nature. Association in thought with such a captain of our salvation has in itself a redemptive potency". (A System of Christian Doctrines, p336),

The question now arises, "How may we utilize the benefits of the Incarnation in our own personal salvation? The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews points the way. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are one". (2:10-11) Salvation must be realized on the same principles and in the same way in which the captain of our salvation is made perfect, viz; by filial obedience and fellowship with God. He was obedient even unto death. His communion with God was unbroken. The God-like life in all men must be essentially the same as it was in the pattern-man. Hence our salvation may be conceived as consisting in life-union with Christ. Paul expresses this

truth in Gal. 2:20. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ, liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me".

Thus Paul considers his salvation as a life in which Christ dwells in him and he in Christ. In this reciprocal indwelling salvation is realized. Our whole spiritual understanding, affections and will are transformed by the renewing and regenerating power of the Divine Savior. By faith in him we become like him. "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord the Spirit". II Cor. 3:18.

CHAPTER IV.

Conclusion.

We will sum up our argument in the following conclusions: (1) Only through the Incarnation do we have an adequate expression of the nature of God as Father and of his saving purposes for mankind. (2) The Incarnation makes manifest the exceeding wickedness of sin, thus awakening repulsion against sin in men's hearts. (3) In the Incarnation we see lived among men the highest conceivable type of manhood. In Christ there is presented to us the perfect man. (4) As the perfect man he sets before us the true goal of endeavor for the perfecting of the race. Man having the pattern before him can bring his intellect, feeling and will into operation in endeavoring to reach the coveted goal, thus developing Christian character. (5) Not only does the Incarnation provide us with a perfect pattern, in itself it provides the dynamic for attaining the goal. Christ redeems us by what he is. (6) Faith in the Divine nature of Christ and fellowship with him is the means by which the saving power of the Incarnation is appropriated to man's needs.