

# The Union of the Altar and the Sacrifice

by G.W. North

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of sacrifice and love, and being a manifestation of Christ's Godhead and sacrifice to the world.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14-16, John 15:13, Romans 12:1, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 13:10, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 John 4:19, Revelation 1:8, Revelation 6:9-11

**Topics:** "First Love", "Sacrifice"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the profound connection between the altar and the sacrifice in his sermon, illustrating how Christ embodies the ultimate sacrifice and how the altar serves as a vital symbol of this relationship. He explains that the altar is not merely a physical structure but a representation of God's eternal love and the call for believers to join in sacrificial love. North highlights that true martyrdom is not just about physical death but living a life of self-offering to God, reflecting the essence of first love. He urges the church to recognize its identity as the body of Christ, embodying His love and sacrifice in the world. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to first love, where believers are invited to live sacrificially and be a light to the world.

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## Transcript

O God, wilt Thou not give us all eyes to see, ears to hear, senses to smell, hands to handle and a heart to understand, lest seeing we see not and hearing we do not hear, nor taste nor handle nor believe; lest our hearts feel nothing and we be all as cold and dead as bodies of useless animals. Of old the Lord did not adapt and accommodate Himself to man by inanimate things, on the contrary He took of man and things and adapted them to Himself. He lost no glory nor laboured in vain when ordering His tabernacle, but, consistently with His being and true to Himself, He accommodated all that He commanded of Israel to one invariable principle of eternal life.

This He did, that by many things He should speak of One only and continuously until He should come Who is the fulfilment of them all. The multitudinous details scrupulously and repetitiously practised were imposed under the limitations of the system of atonements then in force. At that time, because of the nature of the covenant, the Lord had to deal with different issues separately in order to distinguish them; but by the reconciling Christ He dealt with all things at once.

Christ has made the altar of God plain and meaningful and absolutely indispensable to us. He has explained and interpreted it; in His own inimitable way He has forever established it in the midst of the

churches and has had the fact recorded for us in the last book of the Bible. The revelation of Him given in the first chapter is of the Voice speaking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. John turned to see and describe for us the vision he saw. It was of the Lord Jesus; standing there as the Son of Man all-glorious, He was shining, flaming, burning fire. His feet supply the clue to His whole stand on the various counts concerning which He has come to judge in the churches -- they were like fine brass as though they burned in a furnace, says John. He appeared to be exactly what He is -- the apotheosis of sacrifice.

In Israel the only furnace that counted with God was the one which stood at the entrance of His courts. It was the altar of Israel and God. At His commandment it was made of brass and the fire that burned in it was as a furnace that never went out. So fierce was the fire and so intense the heat that it withstood all the tempestuous winds that blew and the rains which tormented upon it summer and winter. Fed by the countless offerings of the myriads of Israel, that fire ate its way through flesh and bone and lapped up the blood of the carcasses heaped upon the altar in fervent devotion. Under such power the bodies quickly turned to ashes, which in turn ultimately found their way on to a heap outside the camp where they lay, grey and dead, far away from the altar. Lying there, mute and lifeless, they gave testimony that the sacrifice had indeed been made; it had ascended up as a savour of love in fire to Him who sat upon the Mercy Seat. And the heart of Him who watched and smelled and tasted the sweet savour rested upon the Christ represented in, though yet unknown by, His people. The Father heard and handled the Son who, all unawares, they offered to God.

It had to be like that. Ignorant as they were of the Christ, they could have neither national nor individual existence or acceptance except He be their all. He it was who symbolically rose up in all His self-sacrificing beauty and glorious love from Israel's brazen altar and stood before God in the midst of His people. If it had to be so for those, how much more must this be also for the Church.

So it is that, burning as fire, with glowing feet, the Lord of love and glory presents Himself to His churches. At first He stands still, right in the midst of them, mutely symbolical, holding before our vision the testimony to the supreme sacrifice still ascending in love to His God and Father on our behalf. Then, in complete accord with His visual manifestation to John and us, He becomes vocal and reveals the reason for His coming to the churches in this form and manner; it is to recall His people to first love. Well may He do so, for who as He should, or is able, or is more prepared to do this? It is of incontrovertible significance that, of all the manifestations of Himself He vouchsafes to John in course of the unfolding revelation, the first should be in connection with the altar in pursuit of first love.

The second vision of Him is as THE LAMB upon and in the midst of the throne. The altar and the throne. This is nothing other than a repetition of the order and connection we observed in the tabernacle -- the altar and the mercy seat. It was the same in John's day as in Moses'; it is still the same now and always will be; it cannot change, for this is the eternal order with God. The form or manifestation may, indeed must, change; but in whatever form it may appear, love and sacrifice cannot exist apart from each other, any more than water can be, apart from being H<sub>2</sub>O -- they are one and the same as are substance and analysis.

So we have laid open for us to see what first love is; it is that quality of love which is in God. He is that first love, and 'He first loved us' says John, and from this source all that is good, pure, holy and beneficial flows, and basic to it all lies sacrifice. The Christ of the churches stands as though rising up from the altar fire, the living sacrifice in a furnace of love. The Vision Glorious manifests the reason for the call and is its

reward. If we love Him and would respond to His call we must first acknowledge the eternal sacrifice, repent and count all things but loss to gain Him in life, join Him on the altar and pass into God.

Hearts may well wail who never were shown this, who have wasted life, time and effort to achieve that which, when gained, is only ashes and has passed from them in the gaining. All that is not motivated by sacrificial love and founded upon the altar life of Christ is rejected by God, for it is a denial of His very life.

'I AM' says the voice that speaks from the altar in the midst of the churches, 'the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, He which is and which was, and which is to come'. His face shining like the burning sun and His feet glowing like the fiery furnace surely testify to the point of moral certainty that His body also must be burning fire too. How could His face burn and shine so that His eyes are leaping flames and His feet glow with the intensity of furnace-heat because of the fire that burns within, and His body not be fire also? It is covered for God's good reasons, but it is surely an open secret.

Truly enough the churches are veiled fire, lamp stands only, but how can the lamps shine except they burn? Surely the Lord is telling us that the light of the churches is Himself as He here manifests Himself to be. If this be not their light, then there is no light for the dark world. The light of the churches is not for themselves but for mankind.

If we will join ourselves to our Lord in sacrificial love, then we shall know exactly what first love is; we may only join Him in first love in order to give ourselves constantly in self-sacrifice to Father. Only then shall we be light and be able to show that kind of light He wishes to shine in this world. Failing to do so, churches will be removed. Organisations created and sustained by men's will and considered by them to be churches may continue as substitutes for genuine churches and be thought to be what Christ instituted, but the true Church will not be there.

Apart from first love there can be no Church nor any churches, for the Church is nothing other than an embodiment of Christ; it is His Body. It embodies and is all that He is -- all that He ever was and shall be; it can be no other; if it differs from that, whatever it is it is not the Church. The Church is here to be in and to this generation what Jesus was in His day to His generation; but not only so, it is also here to display and be a continuing manifestation in and to this age of what God ever has been and shall eternally be.

Way beyond demonstrating the life and powers of Jesus' manhood which every man saw and tasted while He was on earth, the Church has to be a manifestation of His Godhead also. She has to reveal what He eternally was known to be in God and seen to be before angels before He came to earth. The Church throughout its many churches must reveal its God-head or head-ship in God, for He in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily is the Church's head. The Church is the body of Him and because of this is the embodiment of all that. This is its greatest mission in the world.

This is why the Lord appeared as He did to John. He wanted the revelation which God gave to Him of Himself and the future to begin on this note, 'Let love, first love, be in you, consume you, burn you up, keep you eternally alive, as it has been and has done in me from the very first; come, join me on the altar; to sacrifice self is no pain. There is no hardship or suffering here; all that could have felt pain is now dead, only that which lives and rises eternal lives here; you are come to God by me. I have shown you the principle of life, abide here in me, and I in you, on the altar of God, always ascending with me in this love-life to my Father and your Father; I am the resurrection and the life. I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore and so now are you, for I am this in you and you in me. All that I manifested and revealed on earth I am and ever was and shall ever be. I did nothing new on earth,

nothing new to me. What I did was new to men under the sun on earth but there is nothing new under the sun; all that men can know as newness is above the sun, and what I show you now is eternal. As it has been so it is now also; the cross is an altar for you too; come my beloved, join yourselves to me here, offer yourselves also with me without spot to God'.

The Lord emphasises these things with tremendous power when He breaks the fifth of the seals with which the seven-sealed book was so securely closed. When He does this we again see the altar, and under it the souls of them that were slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. From the following verses it is unmistakable that those who suffer martyrdom for the reasons stated have been slain because they have lived upon the altar. Many who have been put to death and called martyrs for reasons acceptable enough to men are not accepted as such nor called martyrs by God.

The Lord states very clearly the ground upon which He classifies men as martyrs. These are they who have lived upon the altar in self-sacrifice which is borne out by the word of God which is in them; that is, they have received, held, lived and spoken the Word of God and their testimony has been that with the Son of God they also are sons of God. These and only these are called martyrs by God. Death by torture or persecution or murder for any good work or cause, wrong as these things are, are not ipso facto classified by God as martyrdom.

Martyrdom as considered by and accepted among men entails physical death, as it does also in the verses in Revelation 6 v.9-11, but originally the word translated witnesses in the New Testament is the Greek word 'martus', and occurs in various grammatical forms in connection with the subject of being a witness and bearing witness or testimony. To be a martyr in this sense did not always result in undeserved and premature death, but it did and still does entail living on the altar. True witness to Jesus Christ cannot be borne by any person except that person lives a life of loving self-offering to God through personal sacrifice. The reading leaves no doubt that this altar principle shall endure until the end of the age, for those slain at the time of which John writes are told by the Lord that they must wait for others to be killed as they, and for the same reason.

However, the altar we have is not the same as that which Israel after the flesh knew; ours is only for those who are after the Spirit. Looking at it through the enlightened eyes of John we see that there are no ashes under this altar; instead gathered there are the souls of the martyrs. What an altar, what a gathering! At the point of death the spirits of that brave and noble army, men and boys, the matron and the maid, departed to be with the Lord, ascended in the sacred flame and their souls remained under the altar. The soul in which the Spirit was revealed and by which it was manifest in the body rests and awaits the reward and shall receive it when finally placed among the glorious company of its peers.

So we see that the Lord is not seeking ashes of dead bodies, but the souls developed by human spirits united with Him on the altar while living in their bodies on earth. Keeping ourselves with Him on the altar, ascending in constant spiritual love to God, ensures that the soul eternally lives the spiritual life of Christ indestructible on the earth among men. This must be the residual remains of every one of us; then, whether or not we die a martyr's death in the flesh, our souls in white await their investiture, which shall be bestowed upon them in the future day of the coronation honours of the Lamb.

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