GORE CHARLES

ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS: A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION. VOL. I

Charles Gore

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Practical Exposition. Vol. I

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24935869
St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Practical Exposition. Vol. I:

Содержание

PREFACE	4
Introduction	6
CHAPTER I. 1-7.	41
CHAPTER I. 8-17.	47
DIVISION I. (CHAPTERS I. 18-III. 20.)	55
DIVISION I. § I. (CHAPTER I. 18-32).	58
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	73

Charles Gore
St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: A Practical Exposition. Vol. I

PREFACE

A good excuse is needed for adding to the large number of excellent commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans which already exist. But I think there is such an excuse. These commentaries are not of the sort which readers who are educated but not scholarly find it easy to master; so that in fact this epistle is at the present day very much misunderstood or ignored by such people. And again, partly owing to its interpretation at the period of the Reformation and by some Evangelicals of later date, it is still practically to a great extent viewed with discomfort and neglected by those who most value the name of Catholic. My excuse, then, for adding to the expositions of the Romans lies in these facts. One who is necessarily immersed in the practical work of the Christian ministry, and is yet struggling to keep himself in some sense in line with biblical scholarship, if his life involves special disadvantages, may yet hope to be useful

in interpreting to ordinary Christians the results of the scholars. And I am persuaded that it requires one who enters thoroughly into the spirit of churchmanship, or the obligation of the one body, to interpret with any completeness the mind of St. Paul.

This volume has practically no more connexion with lectures delivered in Westminster Abbey last Lent, than is implied in its being an exposition of the same epistle by the same person.

The method of exposition in this volume is the same as that pursued in its predecessor on the Epistle to the Ephesians. After a general introduction, each section of the Revised Version is taken, or in some cases two sections are taken together, and prefaced by an analysis or paraphrase, as seems most useful, and followed by further explanation of the main ideas or phrases which each section contains.

The 'appended notes' I have been obliged to defer to the end of the second volume – which, I hope, will appear within a year – with a view of approximately equalizing the size of the two volumes.

CHARLES GORE.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,
Conversion of St. Paul, 1899.

Introduction

i

St. Paul's great Epistle to the Romans was written, as may be quite confidently asserted, from Corinth, during the second visit to Greece recorded in the Acts[1], i.e. in the beginning of the year commonly reckoned 58, but perhaps more correctly 56 A.D. – the year following the writing of the Epistles to the Corinthians. The reasons for this confident statement, and indeed for all that needs to be said about the circumstances under which St. Paul wrote and the conditions of Christianity at Rome, become apparent chiefly in connexion with the later parts of the epistle which are not included in this volume. They shall therefore be omitted here, and we will content ourselves for the moment with a very brief statement of the results in which scholars are now finding, as it would seem, final agreement.

The existence of Christians at Rome was due not to any apostolic founding, for no apostle appears yet to have visited Rome, but to the sort of 'quiet and fortuitous filtration[2]' of Christians from various parts of the empire to its great centre

[1] Acts xx. 23.

[2] Hort's *Prolegomena to Romans and Ephesians* (Macmillan, 1895), p. 9.

which must naturally have taken place; for from all quarters there was a tendency to Rome. 'Some from Palestine, some from Corinth, some from Ephesus and other parts of Proconsular Asia, possibly some from Tarsus, and more from the Syrian Antioch, there was in the first instance, as we may believe, nothing concerted in their going; but when once they arrived in the metropolis, the freemasonry common among Christians would soon make them known to each other, and they would form, not exactly an organized Church' – that may well have been the result of the later presence of St. Paul and St. Peter – 'but such a fortuitous assemblage of Christians as was only waiting for the advent of an apostle to constitute one[3].' Among this assemblage of Christians it appears evident from St. Paul's language[4] that there must have been Jews as well as Gentiles; but the dominant character of the church was Gentile[5]. It is perhaps only putting this in another way to say that there would have been among the Roman Christians elements of hostility to St. Paul and his teaching, but Christianity as St. Paul taught it would have been in the ascendant. And probably St. Paul's special informants about affairs there would have been his special friends, Prisca and Aquila[6].

---

[3] Sanday and Headlam's *Commentary* (T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. xxviii. This commentary is henceforth referred to as S. & H.

[4] See Rom. ii. 17; iii. 9, &c.

[5] See Rom. i. 13; xi. 13-32; xv. 14-21.

[6] Rom. xvi. 3.

The character of the epistle written to these Christians of the capital is marked. It has beyond any other of St. Paul's epistles the character of an ordered theological treatise. Of course it assumes the existence of accepted Christian principles – the rudimentary instruction or Christian 'tradition' – in the minds of those to whom it was addressed[7]. But it takes certain of these principles of the Christian religion and develops them systematically and argumentatively; though again, it must be explained, the argument is very far from being barely logical, but is full of the deepest feeling, showing itself in passages of memorable eloquence which live in the hearts of all of us.

Why this particular epistle should have this character of a systematic treatise is not hard to see. St. Paul was reaching the end of his great controversy for the catholicity of the Gospel, against the Judaizers – that is, for the equal position of Gentiles and Jews in the Church, and against the obligation upon the Gentiles of circumcision and the ceremonial law. That controversy was the occasion of the apostolic conference at Jerusalem, which is described both by St. Luke in the Acts[8] and, from the point of view of St. Paul's own 'apology,' in the Epistle to the Galatians[9]. It is felt at its whitest heat in that intensely concentrated and passionate epistle. But by the time that the Epistle to the Romans came to be written the controversy was

---

[7] See Rom. vi. 17, and remarks p. 234; cf. S. & H., p. xli.

[8] Acts xv. 1-35.

[9] Gal. ii. 1-10.

quieting down. The victory of Catholicism over Judaism was as good as won. The great principle of justification by faith, not by works of the law, had developed itself lucidly and clearly in St. Paul's mind, and flowed out in our epistle in an ordered sequence of thought, rich, profound, and mature.

And there were special reasons why it should have been expressed in writing at this moment, and to the Roman Christians. Though the heat of the conflict inside the Church was over, the fierce hostility of many of the Jews, both within and without the Church, to St. Paul personally was by no means past. Now St. Paul was on his way up to Jerusalem with the money collected in the Gentile churches for the poor brethren there. He attached great importance to this expression of Gentile goodwill, and almost more importance to its acceptance at his hands by the Jerusalem Christians[10]. It was to be a link of mutual, practical love to bind the divergent elements in the Church together. But he felt, and as experience showed rightly, that his enterprise would be attended with great peril to his life. This epistle therefore, like his speech at Miletus, has something of the character of 'last words[11].' He is in writing it committing to the future the fruits of his labours, so far as they can be expressed in a doctrine, at a moment when he feels that their continuance is being seriously imperilled. And this summary of his life's teaching in its most characteristic aspect is most fitly addressed to the Christians of

[10] Rom. xv. 25-32.

[11] Hort, l.c., p. 44.

the great city which was the centre of the then world. St. Paul already conceived of Christianity as, in prospect at least, the religion of the empire. It was vastly important, therefore, that the capital should know it and hold it in its full glory and richness. He himself, if he escaped safe through the visit to Jerusalem, was bent on immediately going thither and securing this great end by his personal ministry[12]. But he could not depend on the future. He must seize the golden moment – buying up the opportunity at least by a letter.

This, in very brief words, is an account of the circumstances and conditions under which the Epistle to the Romans was written, and it must suffice for the moment till some of the details are presented to us in its later chapters.

ii

There are men of whom it is especially true that their teaching is the outcome of their own personal experience. If a man's teaching is to have any real force this must be in a measure true in any case. But in some men the personal experience has set an exceptionally strong impress upon the intellectual convictions, and so upon the teaching. Such men – otherwise very different from one another – are Augustine, Dante, Luther, Bunyan, Newman. Such an one was St. Paul. His intellectual theory is on

[12] Rom. i. 10, 11; xv. 22-24.

fire with the emotions bred of a personal experience, both bitter and sweet, but always intense. And if there is professedly more of autobiography in the Epistle to the Galatians, yet in fact we know St. Paul's interior life, both before and after his 'conversion,' so far as we know it at all, mainly through the generalized account of it in the Epistle to the Romans. For the doctrine of justification by faith, not by works of the law, developed in this epistle, is the record of his personal experience reduced to a general principle. St. Paul had, on the lines of his Pharisaic education, in the first half of his life zealously sought to be justified by works, and had found out his mistake.

What is the real meaning of this phrase? Ordinarily we Englishmen find it natural to appropriate St. James' 'common sense' language about justification rather than St. Paul's, and say that faith is surely of no moral value without works or good actions, and that we can be justified by nothing else except our conduct. Or if the Pharisees are pointed to with their rigid ecclesiastical observances as types of men seeking to be justified before God by the merits of their works, then, in this sense of works, we feel that the idea of justification by such means, apart from deeper moral effort, is one which has passed out of our horizon. Yet if we get to the moral essence of the Pharisaic idea, we may still find it lying very close at hand to us, even though we do not know what a phylactery means, and are at a safe distance from fasting twice in the week, or giving tithes of all that we acquire. A well-to-do Englishman,

of whatever class, has a strong sense of respectability. He has a code of duty and honour which he is at pains to observe. A soldier, a gentleman, a woman of fashion, a peasant's wife, a schoolboy, and an undergraduate, representing not more than the average moral levels of their different classes, will all of them make really great sacrifices to fulfil the requirements of their respective codes. Their conscience requires this of them, and they would be miserable in falling short of it. But their conscience is also limited to it. They resent the claim of a progressive morality. Conscientious within the region of the traditional and the expected, they are often almost impenetrable to light from beyond. They are nervously afraid of the very idea of subjecting their life to a fundamental revision in the light of Christ's claim, or to the idea of surrender to the divine light wherever it may lead. But this frame of mind – conscientiousness within a limited and well-established area accepted by public opinion, coupled with resentment at whatever completer and diviner claim may interfere to disconcert one's self-satisfaction, and bid one begin afresh on a truer basis – is that very attempt to be justified by works which appeared in the case of the Pharisees, only dressed in very different guise to that in which the conditions of modern England clothe it.

For the Pharisees of the Gospels were the later representatives of the Hasidaeans, i.e. Chasidim or 'pious' folk, whom we hear of in the Books of Maccabees[13]. The later religious development

[13] 1 Macc. ii. 42; vii. 13 ff.

of Israel lay along the lines of rigid reverence for the law. In days then of general laxity and a general prevalence of Greek customs, these pious Israelites united themselves to promote the devout observance of their law. Their relation to Maccabaean heroes and rulers varied, as religious or political motives were uppermost in the Maccabaean house. They themselves pursued one consistent aim. They came to be known as the Pharisees, the separated or the separatists, the party who kept aloof from everything common or unclean. As such they represented the religious nation in its later development. They had the bulk of the people, and especially the women, with them. They had consequently, as Josephus tells us, an irresistible influence upon public affairs, and especially upon religious affairs, and they held the social position befitting the legitimate religious leaders of God's own people.

This position, with its accompanying reputation, they doubtless deserved by their zeal for the law, and for the 'traditions of the fathers' which hedged about or interpreted the law. But according to the solemn witness of Christ and St. Paul, a disastrous lowering of the best moral standard of the Old Testament scriptures had taken place among them. The Mosaic law was, of course, a matter mainly of outward observance, and therefore would become a matter of rigid social requirement within the area of such a body as the Pharisees. Nowhere does public opinion act more strongly than in a close religious circle. But the social requirement according to tradition came to be

substituted for that deeper spiritual relation of the 'holy nation' and the individuals composing it to God and His will, which is the real moral essence of the Old Testament. 'How can ye believe,' our Lord said to them, 'which receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not[14]?' This is the central moral weakness of the Pharisaic position. A social or ecclesiastical tradition had taken the place of the will of God. This social tradition was rigid and stern in respect of the 'tradition of the elders,' but it did not revise itself constantly or at all in the light of the mind of God, and therefore its moral standard became debased. It 'made void the word of God because of the tradition.' It 'tithed mint and anise and cummin, and left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgement, and mercy, and faith.' It 'strained out the gnat, and swallowed the camel[15].' It came to be almost purely external and consistent with even the grossest spiritual hypocrisy, as both St. Paul and our Lord Himself assure us. Above all, it was completely satisfied with itself. 'We have Abraham to our Father.' 'I thank thee that I am not as other men are.' That is the characteristic tone of Pharisees and of all who, however unlike them otherwise, are living by a strong social standard and priding themselves on belonging to a respectable and dignified class. This it is that St. Paul calls seeking to be justified or commended to God by 'works' or 'works of the law' – not, we must observe, 'good works,' such as

[14] John v. 44.

[15] Matt. xv. 6; xxiii. 23.

are the fruit of a right disposition towards God, of which St. Paul never spoke with any disparagement.

It is the characteristic of the Pharisaic attitude that a man holds by a strict code enforced by the public opinion of his church or circle; a code which he diligently and even painfully obeys. But it is characteristic of this attitude also that it resents new light, and tacitly claims independence even of God, provided that 'the law' is kept or the accepted standard maintained. Thus the Pharisees resented the Christ, when renewing the voice of the old prophets, without respect of persons, He exposed the moral weaknesses of these religious leaders, and bade them, in effect, begin again and think afresh what God's will really meant: when He warned them that the one unpardonable sin is to be self-satisfied in one's own eyes, and to repudiate as an impertinent intruder the fresh divine light. The story is very familiar. They resented and rejected the Christ because He made the unlimited divine claim upon them: because He spoke to them as God to the human soul, and not as the representative of 'the tradition.' 'Seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God[16].'

Now we understand what it is to seek to be justified by works. It is to have a social or ecclesiastical code, and to claim acceptance in God's sight because we perform it, meanwhile making 'the law' under which we act, believed to be divine, a substitute for the living and personal God, and resenting any fresh

[16] Rom. x. 3.

and immediate claim of God on the human soul.

In this mixture of subservience and independence, of religious humility and human pride, Saul of Tarsus had been brought up 'at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem.' His was not one of those slack consciences which enable men to take the lowest line which respectable public opinion will allow. In every ecclesiastical system the strict law comes to be mitigated by various dispensations and compensations – generally substitutions of the easier ceremonial for the harder moral requirement. But young Saul no doubt took the law in its fullest sense as the thing to be kept, with all its accompanying traditions. So taken, it constituted no doubt what St. Peter calls it[17] – an intolerable yoke. A strict Jew must have had a very difficult life of it. But it was not this yoke of specific outward requirements that staggered St. Paul. What he found crushing was the inward claim – 'Thou shall not covet[18].' He who had determined to appear before God at the last with a clear record as one who had kept the law, found himself confronted by an inner and searching claim of the divine righteousness, to which no blamelessness in outward conduct enabled him to correspond. He could not help feeling himself a sinner in the eye of God; and the sacrificial system plainly gave his conscience no relief at all. He does not even allude to it in this connexion. Meanwhile, as he moved about in Jewish society of the empire at Tarsus and elsewhere, he found that it required

[17] Acts xv. 10.

[18] Rom. vii. 7.

no spiritual microscope to discover that the law in many of its plainest moral injunctions was in fact not being observed at all. He seemed to see that instead of the law being really the means of justification, it in effect put 'the righteous nation' simply in the position of condemned sinners, and himself among them, as fully as if they were simply without a divinely given law, like the 'sinners of the Gentiles.'

We know well how, when the way of God had been learnt more perfectly, this earlier moral experience of the effect of the law on himself and others worked itself out in St. Paul's mind into a deep theory of the function, not of 'the law' only, that is the Mosaic law, but of law altogether – of 'the letter' of any body of external enactments. Law, he found, could enlighten the conscience, but it could never reach deep enough to the springs of will to strengthen and purify them. God must become more intimate to man than any external law can make Him. A law of ordinances can only be a preparatory discipline, intended by the very falsity of the assumption on which it is based to teach men that they are not what they fancied themselves. They fancied themselves beings sufficiently independent to stand on their own basis and enter into a covenant with God, to make a compact with Him to observe a law and to abide by the result. It is the function of such a compact as between independent parties to convince men that any such relation between God, the Creator and Giver, and man, the creature and simply the receiver – still more between God the Holy and man the defiled and weakened

– is simply contrary to fundamental facts[19].

As yet, however, St. Paul was only rendered miserable by his experience under the law. To feel himself a sinner alienated from God was a profound humiliation to his spiritual pride. He was fired no doubt by the lofty ideal of the righteous nation, standing before God in virtue of its righteousness, of its performance of the divine law, and therefore making its claim on God to vindicate it before the whole world. He threw himself zealously into rigid observance: only, however, to find himself humiliated and perplexed.

Meanwhile, he was becoming conscious of the claim of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ. Under what conditions that claim began to confront him we do not in the least know. But he must have known in the period before his conversion that the severest attack on the spiritual position of the Pharisees ever delivered had been delivered by Him who claimed to be the Christ; that the Pharisees in consequence had thrown all their influence into the rejection of His claim, and if they had not been the most direct instruments of His death, yet had encouraged and sanctioned it. Thus the more dissatisfied he became in his own conscience, the more zealous he grew for the Pharisaic position, and the more fanatical, therefore, against the followers of the crucified Jesus. At what point it began to dawn upon his conscience that perhaps Jesus was right and not the Pharisees; that perhaps it was in His

[19] See the argument of Gal. iii. 15-22. 'God is one' in a sense which excludes the idea of any relatively independent contracting party over against Him.

teaching that his own restless heart was to find repose, we can only wonder. Some struggle such as this dawning consciousness would involve he certainly passed through. 'It was hard for him to kick against the goad[20].' At last, and at a definite moment, God 'triumphed over him' in Christ, and he gave in his allegiance to Jesus as the Christ on the road to Damascus. Many a man has thus after a struggle surrendered to God at discretion: many a man has shown the will, as Faber calls it,

> 'to lose my will in His,
> And by that loss be free.'

But to no man can it ever have involved a completer sacrifice of his own pride and prejudice – of his own personal comfort and safety – than it did to St. Paul: and, therefore, in no man did it ever involve a vaster increase of spiritual illumination. Hitherto he had stood on the basis which his pride in his religious position gave him and, starting thence, had sought to erect the spiritual fabric of a life acceptable to God. But the more he had known of God and the more he had struggled, the less satisfied he had become. God seemed to be in no other attitude towards him than that of a dissatisfied taskmaster. Now he had surrendered at discretion into God's hands. He had no position of his own to maintain. He had put himself in God's hands. In His sight he was content to be treated as a sinner, just like one of the Gentiles – to be forgiven

[20] Acts xxvi. 14.

of His pure and unmerited love, and of His pure and unmerited love endued with a spiritual power for which he could take no credit to himself, for it was simply a gift. Once more, he had henceforth no prejudices and recognized no limitation on what he might be required to bear or do. His life was handed over to be controlled from above. Thus when St. Paul sets justification by faith and faith only in opposition to justification by works of the law, he is contrasting two different attitudes towards God and duty, which in the two halves of his own sharply sundered life he had himself conspicuously represented. The contrast may be expressed perhaps in four ways.

1. The man under the law of works is mainly concerned about external conduct and observances – the making clean of the outside of the cup and the platter: the man of faith is concerned almost altogether with the relation of his heart to God at the springs of action. Faith is a disposition of the heart which indeed results in a certain kind of outward conduct, but which has its value already, prior to the outward conduct, because of what it inwardly is. Faith, as Calvin said, pregnant with good works, justifies before they are brought forth. This distinction between faith and works underlies St. Paul's teaching in parts, but is never very prominent. It accounts, however, for St. Paul's shrinking from any insistence upon outward observances in the Church, such as do not necessarily convey any spiritual meaning or power. 'Why,' he cries to the Colossians, 'do ye subject yourselves to ordinances; handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things

are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?[21]'

2. Inasmuch as 'the law' was a national thing, so 'works of the law' were a supposed means of justification confined to Israel, and an occasion of contempt for other nations. Faith, on the other hand, the mere capacity to feel our own wants and to take God at His word, is a universal quality and belongs, or may belong, to all men. Thus justification by faith is opposed to justification by works of the law, as the universal or catholic to the merely Jewish or national, and in this aspect the contrast occupies a great place in St. Paul's thought and teaching.

3. But it is not in the things it is occupied about, or in the range of its activity, that faith is most centrally contrasted with works. It is in the attitude of man towards God which it represents. The 'worker' for justification always retains his own independence towards God. He works upon the basis of a definite covenant by which God is bound as well as himself. He has the right to resent additional claims. Faith, on the other hand, means an entire abandonment of independence. It is self-committal, self-surrender. 'I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day[22].' The man of faith throws all the responsibility for life on God, and says simply and continually, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'

---

[21] Col. ii. 20-22.

[22] 2 Tim. i. 12.

It is of the utmost importance to notice that this is the only attitude of man towards God which corresponds with the ultimate facts of human nature, as science and philosophy are bound to represent them. Man is, in fact, an absolutely dependent being, physically and spiritually. His virtue must lie, not in originativeness, but in correspondence. Supposing him a free agent in God's universe, his freedom can only consist in a power to correspond with divine forces and laws intelligently and voluntarily; or on the other hand to disturb the divine order of creation in a measure by wilfulness and sin. Now faith is simply the faculty of loving correspondence with God. 'Justification by faith' is the only conception of justification which is possible in the light of the root facts of human nature. But of course the practical appeal of this conclusion to the heart and will is immensely increased, if men can be shown to have acted as if they were independent and to have found it a failure; if life lived in independence of God, with God as it were withdrawn from the actual scene of life to its far-off horizon, is found to have resulted in havoc, weakness and despair. So, in fact, St. Paul's doctrine of the true means of justification is based on an appeal, not so much to the ultimate constitution of our human nature as to the experienced results of our independence of God, to the facts of sin, whether among Gentiles or Jews.

4. Finally, the principle of justification by faith is contrasted with that of justification by works of the law in the view which it involves of the character of God. The law, as St. Paul interprets

it, views God as a lord and taskmaster. Faith presents Him as the Father of our spirits, always waiting upon us with His eternal, unchangeable love; bearing with us; dealing with us even on a false basis which by our sins we have forced upon Him, in order to bring us to a recognition of the true; anyway acting or withholding action, if by any means we can be won to recognize His true character and our true life.

These are the broad contrasts between the alternative methods of justification by faith or by 'works of the law.' The law, and the attitude towards God which the law suggested, are, in St. Paul's view, the main characteristic of the Old Testament. This is a point of view which we should expect in one trained by the Pharisees. We may possibly feel that St. Paul tends to identify with the Old Testament as a whole one particular element in it which specially characterized one particular period. But at least the element was there, and occupied there a highly important place in the whole development; and if St. Paul in his idealizing manner sometimes speaks as if it was the whole of the older covenant, as if he had forgotten all the teaching of prophet and psalmist, yet he is not really forgetful. Law is to him the characteristic of the old covenant. But behind the law God's dealings with Abraham are for ever in his imagination witnessing against the law's limitation, and a similar witness is kept up all along: so that St. Paul can take out of one of the books of Moses his very central statement of the principle of faith[23].

[23] Rom. x. 5-8.

In what has just been said justifying faith has been treated as if it were simply, as it is really, faith in God; whereas in St. Paul's language the object of justifying faith is constantly 'Jesus[24].' The explanation of this is that in Jesus Christ God has manifested His character as Father, and has come near to men, 'reconciling the world unto Himself,' by the atonement wrought through His incarnate Son, and giving conspicuous evidence of His saving power by raising Him from the dead[25]. Thus, if Jesus is the proximate object of justifying faith, it is Jesus as manifesting the Father, Jesus as God incarnate; and St. Peter is strictly interpreting St. Paul when he represents the object of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection in the phrase, 'that your faith and hope might be in God[26].' The faith of the Christian is the old faith of Abraham and Habakkuk, the faith in the Lord Jehovah only now made manifest in a new and completer manner, in a more intimate relation to human life, and with a more winning appeal to the human heart.

iii

Now that we have gained a general idea of what St. Paul meant

---

[24] Cf. iii. 22, 26, &c.

[25] 2 Cor. v. 19; Rom. iv. 25.

[26] 1 Pet. i. 21. It is of course the case that the name God in the New Testament is *generally* reserved for the Father, though the proper divinity of Son and Spirit is constantly implied.

by justification by faith, as opposed to justification by works of law, we are in a position to deal with a number of questions which have been famous in ecclesiastical history. Does justification mean being made righteous, or being reckoned for righteous? if it means the latter, how can God reckon us as being what in fact we are not? Again, what is the relation of this justification to sanctification? are these two stages, of which the first is over before the second can begin? Again, what is the relation of justification to Church membership? is justification a purely individual process or fact, of which membership in the Church or, what comes to the same thing, reception of the sacraments, is a merely secondary and strictly unessential consequence?

The answers to these questions are all connected with one another. Justification, to begin with, is a judicial or, as it is called, 'forensic' word. It expresses the verdict of acquittal. The use of the word in the Bible made this quite indisputable[27]. Thus God justifies whenever He refuses to condemn – when, whatever may have been our sins, He ignores them, and therefore positively admits us into the accepted people. And He declares His willingness to do this simply because a man believes in Jesus Christ. Let a man believe, or take God in Jesus Christ at His gracious word, and the value of this act of trust or allegiance is such that God reckons it for righteousness, and admits a man into the accepted people, as if he were already fit for such fellowship in his actual habits or character. There is 'imputation' here, but

[27] See below, p. 124.

it is the right sort of imputation. It is dealing with us not as we are, nor exactly as we are not, but as we are becoming in virtue of a new attachment under which our life has passed: and this, as the engrossing modern conception of development makes it easy for us to perceive, is the only true and profound way of regarding anything. Not the standard already reached, but the movement, direction, or vitality is the important matter. Faith, then, is 'reckoned for righteousness' because it puts us upon the right basis and in the right relation to God; and therefore is a root out of which, provided it continues to subsist, all righteousness can healthily grow; whereas the most brilliant efforts or 'works' on a wrong basis may have neither sound root nor principle of progress in them. To believe in Jesus is to have the root of the matter in oneself. Therefore, when a man first believes, God can ignore all his previous life, and deal with him simply on the new basis, in hope. Of course this preliminary acquittal or acceptance is provisional. As the servant[28] who had been forgiven his debts found them rolled back upon him when he behaved in a manner utterly inconsistent with the position of a forgiven man, so our preliminary justification may be promptly cancelled by our future conduct if we behave as one who has 'forgotten the cleansing from his old sins[29].' The prodigal son, after he has been welcomed home, may go back again to the 'far country.' But it remains the fact: – of such infinite value and fruitfulness is

[28] Matt. xviii. 23-35.

[29] 2 Pet. i. 9.

faith in God, as He has shown Himself in Jesus, that when a man first believes – aye, whenever, over and over again, he returns to believe – he is in God's sight on a new basis, however dark be the background of his previous sins; and he can be dealt with simply on the new basis, according to the movement of the Father's heart of love which his faith has set free.

Now the justifying faith of the conscience-stricken sinner, whose case St. Paul always has in the foreground of his imagination, means first of all and most obviously that he consciously takes God at His word as being ready to forgive his sins, and accept him for Jesus' sake in whom he believes. It is belief in God as forgiving, or in Jesus as – he does not stop to inquire how – obtaining and giving him forgiveness. And St. Paul laid great stress on this simple acceptance of the gift of pardon, as the gate of the new life and the first act of faith, because the readiness to be treated as a sinner and merely forgiven in spite 'f our sins is, as he knew full well in his own case, the final overthrow of spiritual pride. But this simple 'reliance on the merits of Christ,' and acceptance of forgiveness at His hands and for His sake, is a profound movement of the heart – of the spring of human actions – which involves much more than appears. Luther was hopelessly wrong and unlike St. Paul when he isolated this mere reliance on another's merits, and, setting it apart from all deeper movement of will or love, would have it, and it only, concerned with our justification. To St. Paul even the first movement of faith is a surrender of independence, and

a recognition in intellect, and much more in will, of the lordship of Jesus. It is, in other words, a change of allegiance, and this is the important thing about it. And the absolved man, in thanking God for his forgiveness, finds himself, as it were, inevitably and without any fresh act, embarked on a new service. If he does not find this, he is not a man of faith at all. Faith is so deep a principle that, though it shows itself first as the mere acceptance of an undeserved boon from the divine bounty, it involves such hanging upon God as necessarily enlists the will to choose and serve Him, the intellect to know and worship Him with a growing perception as He is revealed in Jesus, and the affections to desire and love Him. The life of justification thus proceeds 'from faith to faith' – from faith in Christ 'for us' to faith in Christ 'in us.' The justified man, accepted into the 'body of Christ' by baptism and made a participator of the life of Christ, receives the continual gifts of the divine bounty in their appointed channels, and his faith exercising its natural faculty of correspondence, absorbs and appropriates the divine gifts – intellectually, so that the eyes of the understanding are opened in increasing knowledge – practically, so that 'Christ dwells in the heart by faith,' and it is no longer the bare human self which lives, but Christ which lives in the renewed man, with a continual display of moral power.

The first justification or acceptance is therefore a preliminary step: it is acceptance for admission into the divine household, or city of God, or life in Christ. It is a means to an end, and that end the fellowship of Christ, and continually developing

assimilation to Him. Does this mean, then, that justification and sanctification are processes following the one on the other, of which the former is over before the latter begins? Such a statement must be repudiated so far as its latter clause is concerned. You cannot thus logically sever a vital process. They are two parts of one vital process; and the man who is not on the way to being made like Christ (however far off it he may be at the moment) is by that very fact shown to be not in a state of justification or acceptance with God. At any stage of spiritual life there must be movement in order to make forgiveness possible. Grant this however and it becomes true that justification, as meaning acquittal, is a preliminary to sanctification, that is, the being made like Christ. The having our 'heart set at liberty' is a preliminary to 'running the way of God's commandments.' But even so we must recognize that St. Paul never exactly uses this language. When he describes the stages of God's dealings with the soul he passes from justification to glorification, or (final) deliverance from sin and wrath[30]. Or, on one occasion, he mentions sanctification before justification[31].

This is in part accounted for by the fact that the word translated 'sanctify' or 'sanctification' means rather 'consecrate' (as to priesthood) or 'consecration.' And though this consecration involves 'sanctity' (in our sense) because of the character of God to whom we are dedicated, yet it may

[30] Rom. v. 9-11.

[31] 1 Cor. vi. 11.

precede it; and we are in fact consecrated and hallowed at the moment when we are accepted into the 'priestly body' and anointed with the divine unction[32]. This exact meaning of the term sanctification in part accounts for St. Paul not speaking of sanctification and justification as successive stages of the spiritual life. When he is speaking about justification he is answering the question, What is the attitude of the human soul towards God which sets God free, so to speak, to accept it and work upon it? And the answer is, The attitude of faith. When he speaks of sanctification, or rather consecration, he is answering the implied question, How is the individual to be thought of when he has been admitted by baptism into the Christian community? And the answer is, He is to be thought of as consecrated, or as sharing the life of a consecrated people[33]. St. Paul's language in one place would suggest that if 'justification' qualifies for admission into the life in Christ, the result of this admission is again a justification, not now merely of our persons, but of our whole moral being – a 'justification of life[34].' But this is, at least, not his usual use of the word.

And now we approach the question of the relation of our individual justification to membership in the Church and all that

---

[32] Cf. Hort, *First Ep. of Peter* (Macmillan, 1898), p. 70.

[33] It is noticeable that St. Paul never uses the verb translated 'to be sanctified' of persons in the present tense. It always describes an already existing state rather than a process.

[34] Rom. v. 18, but cf. later, p. 202.

goes with that. To put the question in a rough controversial way – Is the Epistle to the Romans, as it has been frequently held to be, a thoroughly Protestant work?

The Prophet Ezekiel first clearly discerned and expressed the truth that the new covenant of God with man must be based upon the conversion of individual wills and hearts. So it was realized. The basis of the Church was a profound movement of individual faith and love and allegiance, in the apostles and first disciples. And that on which it is based is that by which it must progress – the real assent and correspondence of individual wills and hearts. They that receive the testimony must set to their seals that God is true. Thus one cannot possibly exaggerate the importance in Christianity of the individual spiritual life, or of individual conversion and faith, if he does not isolate it. He cannot possibly exaggerate the stress laid in the Epistle to the Romans on individual faith and its results, if he does not forget its context. But what is meant by this proviso? This simply. St. Paul, in his doctrine of justification by faith, is describing the basis of the new covenant of God with man which is, as truly as the old, a covenant with a community, an Israel of God. The faith which justifies, therefore, means the faith which qualifies for the community as truly as it admits into the favour of God. The very evidence that God accepts the first movement of faith is that the believing man is admitted by baptism into the body of Christ. The idea of a faith in Jesus which does not seek admission into 'the body,' or disparages it even while it accepts it, does not

even present itself to St. Paul's mind. A faith which is content to remain outside Christ is no faith at all, and the act of being 'baptized into Christ' is an act by which 'in one spirit we are baptized into one body.' Again, the conception impressed upon the institution of the Eucharist is that Christ's atoning sacrifice is the basis of a new covenant with a society which is to share His life[35].

Elsewhere St. Paul expresses this by saying that what Christ bought for Himself was a Church, a new Israel[36]. What His sacrifice purchased was a new *community*. There is the less necessity to insist upon this truth because it is now being very generally perceived. The most powerful influence in recent German Protestant theology is that of Albrecht Ritschl, and through him the truth has come back, through unexpected channels, that the object of the sacrificial death of Christ, and therefore of the divine justification, is not the individual but the Church[37]; or, if we may venture to modify the phrase, the object of divine justification is the individual only as becoming and remaining (so far as His will is concerned) a member of the Church. In fact, 'justification' may be rendered, without any false idea being attached to it, 'acceptance for membership in the sacred people, the Israel of God.' And where any one has

---

[35] Hort, l.c., p. 24.

[36] Eph. v. 25; Tit. ii. 14; cf. Acts xx. 28.

[37] Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, ii. p. 217 ff. Cf. S. & H., p. 122; and Orr, *Ritschlian Theology* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1898) p. 169 ff.

become a member of the Church without even the rudimentary faith which can render him acceptable in God's sight, there the awakening of such faith is the condition of profitable or 'saving' membership.

From this point of view it is not difficult to see the relation of our epistle, broadly, to Protestantism and Catholicism. Protestantism was a reaction against one-sided ecclesiasticism. The Church is the household of God, the home of His people. She guides and disciplines their souls. She feeds them with the bread of life. But her representatives may suffer her to lose the spiritual characteristics of the new covenant and fall back upon those of the old. She may come to be characterized by a mere authoritativeness. The spirit of 'the law of ordinances' may come to prevail again. The sacraments may be treated as charms; or, in other words, all moral and spiritual requirement may be summed up in mere obedience, or in doing this and that. So, in fact, it happened to a great extent in the popular mediaeval system; and Protestantism was a reaction. It was a reaction based on truth, as Luther seemed to himself to re-discover it in the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. But the reaction broke up the communion of Christians. It thus impaired the sense of the one body, and very often resulted in obliterating the perception of any obligation to the visible body of Christ at all. It became individualist, and disparaged the sacraments which are at once both the outward means of union with Christ and the bonds of cohesion for His body, the Church. But as we now look

back upon the matter, we can see as clearly as it is possible to see anything, that both mediaeval Catholicism and Lutheran Protestantism (or modern English Protestantism) represent one-sided developments in which thoughtful men cannot permanently acquiesce. The preliminary justifying faith of the individual does but warrant his admission into the body of Christ, the divine society, by baptism. And once admitted into the body, and instructed in her tradition, faith finds its function intellectually in meditating upon and appropriating the full meaning of the mystery of God, and spiritually in appropriating and digesting the powers of that divine and human life into which baptism admits us, and in which the sacramental feast and sacrifice continually makes us anew participators. The Church with its sacramental gifts, and the personal faith of the converted heart, are no more to be set in antithesis than food and digestion, or the 'virtue which went out of Christ' and the faith in Him which made men whole. The sacraments certainly do not save us without conversion and faith, and faith which leaves us voluntarily isolated from the visible communion of the one body is not what St. Paul meant by 'justifying faith.'

'Ah, yet consider it again!' is what we are continually tempted to exclaim to some of our modern controversialists who appear to be still repeating the watchwords of the sixteenth century. For in fact the famous controversial positions of the period of the Reformation were intensely one-sided, and have been antiquated by completer and maturer study – not least in the matter of

justification.

Thus Calvin's position on the subject was based upon and permeated by a conception of God as predestinating and creating and internally constraining some men to eternal life, and equally predestinating and creating and abandoning other men, without possibility of recovery, to eternal misery. Such a conception is utterly abhorrent to modern consciences: and we shall have occasion to observe with how little reason any conception of God predestinating man to eternal misery has been attributed to St. Paul[38].

Luther again, who identified himself, as no other teacher has ever done, with St. Paul's epistles of justification, was so zealous to separate the faith in virtue of which God justifies us from all idea of merit, that he represented it as a bare acceptance of the divine offer without any moral quality at all – a bare believing ourselves to be saved, without any moral reason in it. Thus, accepting an existing scholastic distinction between an 'informed' faith, i.e. a faith ensouled by love, and a 'formless' or bare faith, he held the faith on account of which God justifies us to be rigidly of the formless kind; and while fully recognizing the richer sort of faith as the God-given quality of those already justified, declared that it had nothing to do with their justification. But this conception of two separate sorts of faith, of which only the loveless sort, that involves no moral worth, has to do with our acceptance with God, is not only a high

[38] The subject comes forward especially in connexion with chapters ix-xi.

road to moral laxity or antinomianism, but is also utterly alien to the spirit of St. Paul, in whom the whole life of faith is one and continuous[39]. It could only have arisen at a particular moment of theological controversy which is past and gone. And the same must be said of the allied doctrine of the total depravity of our fallen nature, which drove men to violent misinterpretations alike of scripture and of their moral instincts.

And what of the Tridentine theology? No doubt in its general view of our fallen human nature it is far more reasonable and Pauline than the Lutheran; and it is also truer to St. Paul in laying the main stress on a divine righteousness actually imparted to us, and not on Christ's merits imputed and not imparted; or, in other words, in recognizing that forgiveness is only a prelude to the development of a new life of holiness. But on the other hand it puts itself hopelessly out of relation to St. Paul's language and thought by interpreting justification as the being made righteous, and accordingly speaking of baptism as the instrument by which we are justified, whereas to St. Paul justification means our preliminary acceptance without regard to what we have been, and the initial faith which enables men to be thus accepted would normally, in those he is thinking about, have preceded baptism, as in his own case, or that of Cornelius, or of the eunuch. Who can doubt that the faith of St. Paul's conversion is what enabled

[39] I know that any brief statement about Luther's doctrine may be disputed, for his own statements vary considerably. But I think the tendency of his teaching is fairly represented above.

God to accept him, though it remained for him, as for other men, to 'wash away his sins' by being 'baptized into Christ[40]?'

May we not truly say that deeper and maturer study of St. Paul has for us undercut and antiquated the theological standing-grounds of the sixteenth century, and substituted for them something both truer, completer, and freer?

iv

It only remains to make more emphatic what has been already suggested, that the Pauline doctrine of justification is of much more than antiquarian interest. We do not, as has been already shown, get rid of the 'danger of thinking to be saved by works' because we are not, like the Pharisees, abandoned to ecclesiastical observances. All moral codes or standards, sanctioned by a society or class and involving no more than a limited liability, come under the moral category of 'works of a law.' They all are apt to leave men as independent of God as the Pharisees, and as resentful of the fuller light. The late Master of Balliol expresses a characteristic opinion that the notions of 'legal righteousness,' or of 'the pride of human nature,' or 'the tendency to rebel against the will of God, or to attach an undue

[40] 'Acceptance' is already acquittal; but only in view of the new life of the body of Christ which is to emancipate man from the power of sin. Thus it is only as incorporated into Christ that he finds his former sin 'put away.' 'I believe in one baptism for the remission of sins.'

value to good works[41],' are 'fictions as applied to our own time[42].' But this is surely lamentably untrue. Men all round us dread the idea of committing themselves to God. They do not know how far it will carry them. They are like would-be soldiers who should refuse to enlist till they had had some assurance as to the extremest risk that their service might involve. Thus, because they cannot get this assurance, they will make no beginning of the life of real faith. They live by a limited code which retains their independence for them. If they are also ecclesiastically minded, the 'legal righteousness' always involved in this sort of morality becomes even outwardly more like that of the Pharisees, and it is not very uncommon among churchmen. But the whole habit of mind, inside or outside the area of professed churchmanship, has its root in what is properly and profoundly human pride and the false clinging to independence of God. This 'pride of life' seems to be almost more dangerous and, in fact, disastrous than even 'the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes.' Thus if we can only get St. Paul's doctrine of the necessity of faith rightly understood, there is no teaching more necessary for these times.

And, on the other hand, where men are really ready to follow the light and do God's will, they need – they need exceedingly for the good of the whole body – to realize St. Paul's teaching about justification, that is, about God's constant attitude towards

---

[41] He should say, if he would represent St. Paul, 'works,' not 'good works.'

[42] Essay on 'Righteousness by Faith,' in *Epistles of St. Paul* (Murray, 1894), vol. ii. p. 264. The whole essay is very characteristic and very interesting, but not very Pauline.

men, in order to obtain that peace which is meant to be, not the far-off goal of Christian life, but its basis and foundation. When a person is continuously apprehensive and excited about his spiritual state, he is not in the temper of mind in which he can best serve God or work out his own or other men's salvation. 'Peace must go before as well as follow after; a peace, too, not to be found in the necessity of law (as philosophy has sometimes held), but in the sense of the love of God to His creatures. He has no right to this peace, and yet he has it.' In these words of the same writer whom we just now were obliged to criticize we may find a simple expression of the truth. 'Wherefore, being accepted of God simply because we take Him at His word, let us have and hold peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ[43].' Then we can throw ourselves without embarrassments into the life of love and sacrifice, the life which has the love of God in Christ for its motive, and reflects it among men.

No doubt we must admit that St. Paul's doctrine of justification has not been generally appreciated in the Church – the fact is strange, but it is indisputable. No doubt also we must admit that those who have chiefly been identified with it have often even disastrously distorted it. No doubt, as a result both of this neglect and of this distortion, the ordinary religious Englishman of the present day is disposed to pass it by as having little meaning for him. Nevertheless it remains true that no revival of religion can ever attain to any ripeness or richness

[43] Rom. v. 1.

unless this central doctrine of St. Paul's gospel resumes its central place with us also. For, as St. Paul preached it, it means this above all else – personal devotion to Jesus Christ as our redeemer. This personal devotion begins by accepting from Him the unmerited boon of forgiveness of our sins, and (what is only the other side of such forgiveness) inheritance in the consecrated body. But the consciousness of what we have received from Christ, and the price it cost Him to put it at our disposal, gives to the whole subsequent life the character of a devotion based on gratitude. This is the Christian life according to St. Paul – personal devotion to Christ and personal service based on gratitude for what He has done for us. 'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again.'

CHAPTER I. 1-7.
Salutation

It was the custom in the days of the Romans to begin a letter with a brief indication from whom it came and to whom it was addressed, in the form of a complimentary salutation, thus – to take an example from the New Testament – 'Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix, greeting[44].' We are familiar in our day with the like forms for beginning and ending letters, serving the same purpose and generally no other. St. Paul then accepts the epistolary form of his day, but pours into it an increasing wealth of personal meaning[45]. Thus in this place the necessary address – 'Paul the apostle to the believers in Jesus Christ which are in Rome, greeting' – is expanded into a salutation extraordinarily full of meaning, explaining (1) who it is who writes the letter; (2) with what justification; (3) to whom; and (4) with what greeting.

(1) It is Paul who is writing, and he describes himself both personally and officially. Personally, since the day when he surrendered himself on the road to Damascus, he has been 'the slave of Jesus Christ,' bound in all things to do His will, and

---

[44] Acts xxiii. 26.

[45] The salutation of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the earliest epistle, is the most nearly formal. Those to the Romans and to Titus are the fullest and richest.

exulting all the time in the moral liberty which that bondage gave him. Officially, he has received a commission and an office equal to that of the older apostles in the kingdom of Christ: he has been 'called to be an apostle, separated to proclaim the good tidings of God.'

(2) It is then this glorious commission that justifies his writing. These good tidings of God are the fulfilment of an age-long promise for which the world had been waiting. Of ancient days there were 'prophets,' men commissioned to speak for God, whose writings remained after them and are held in highest reverence as 'holy scriptures.' These men foretold good days from God that were to come to His people in the coming of the divinely anointed king, the Christ. And now they are come. God has sent to redeem men not a servant, but His own Son. True, He came as man among men: as one of the royal house of David, the house from which the Christ was promised; yet simply man in outward nature and appearance, or 'according to the flesh.' But besides that ordinary seeming manhood, there was in Him something higher – a sacred spiritual nature. And this higher nature it was that finally determined the estimate in which He was to be held. If 'according to the flesh' He was a man of David's house, according to this 'spirit of holiness' He was decisively designated by God's own act as Son of God in miraculous power, and that especially when He was made the example of a resurrection from the dead. Thenceforth 'Jesus' of Nazareth is 'Christ' and 'the Lord' of Christians. It is He through

whom St. Paul and his fellows received the outpouring of the divine bounty for their own lives, and their apostolic commission on behalf of the name of Christ to bring all the nations of the earth to the obedience of faith. And this commission extends as far as the Roman Christians and justifies St. Paul in writing to them.

(3) To all the Christians at Rome, then, 'called to be saints,' i.e. called into the consecrated body and to the consecrated life, St. Paul is writing. He does not say 'to the church which is at Rome,' as in the other epistles of this date he writes 'to the church at Corinth' and to 'the churches of Galatia.' And though this might be accidental, yet probably it is due to the fact that St. Paul thought of the Roman Christians as individuals who, many of them, had been converted elsewhere and for various reasons had come to be living at Rome; so that in fact they had hardly yet attained the consistency of a single ordered church.

(4) And to these Christians he gives his greeting by wishing for them those gifts which may be taken as summing up the blessings of Christ about which this epistle is to say so much – 'grace,' which is God's love to us in actual operation, and 'peace,' which is the state of mind of one who realizes God's love – from the Father and the Son. This benediction is, however, but a Christian form of that of Aaron, 'The Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace[46].'

[46] Num. vi. 25, 26; see Hort, *First Ep. of Peter*, p. 25.

> Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, which he promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead; *even* Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake: among whom are ye also, called *to be* Jesus Christ's: to all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is, I believe, nothing in the above analysis which is not implied at least in the original language of this salutation. And it is a remarkable summary of the grounds of St. Paul's Christian belief, more exact and explicit than the 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, of the seed of David, according to my gospel[47].' There are some points in it which require further notice: —

1. The use of 'spirit of holiness' in connexion with Christ (in ver. 4). Here it is put in antithesis to 'the flesh,' i.e. Christ as He appeared to the outward eye in His natural manhood; and describes, vaguely and without further definition, the higher nature of which, behind His visible manhood, men became

[47] 2 Tim. ii. 8.

conscious[48]. Elsewhere 'spirit' is more exactly used to describe (1) the human spirit in us or in Christ[49]; (2) disembodied persons or angels or devils[50]; (3) the Holy Ghost[51]; (4) the being of God[52]; (5) generally what has will and consciousness, as opposed to the merely external, the 'flesh' or the 'letter[53].' Sometimes, as in 2 Cor. iii. 17, it is hard to feel sure about the exact shade of meaning.

2. We have here, in a very brief compass, St. Paul's conception of 'Christian evidences.' He begins from Christ, 'according to the flesh.' 'And why,' asks Chrysostom, 'did he not begin from the higher side? Because Matthew also, Luke and Mark, begin from the lower. One who would lead others upwards must begin from below. And this was in fact the divine method. First they saw Him (Christ) as man on the earth, and then perceived Him to be God.' It was, in other words, through the experience of His manhood that they arrived at His Godhead. And the evidence of His divine sonship was in part miraculous; but it was not mere miracle. It was miracle 'according to a spirit of holiness.' It was miracle filled with spiritual and moral meaning. It was a resurrection

---

[48] Cf. 1 Tim. iii. 16, 'justified in the spirit,' where the use is approximately the same.

[49] See 1 Thess. v. 23; 1 Cor. v. 5; James ii. 26; Matt. v. 3; xxvi. 41; 1 Pet. iii. 18; Mark viii. 12.

[50] Luke xxiv. 39; Heb. xii. 23; i. 14; Matt. viii. 16, &c.

[51] Matt. iii. 16; Luke x. 21, R.V. &c.

[52] John iv. 24.

[53] John vi. 63; Rom. ii. 29; 2 Cor. iii. 6.

vindicating perfect righteousness.

3. The phrase 'the resurrection of the dead' is translated more exactly by Wiclif 'agenrisynge of dead *men*! Christ's resurrection is the great example of what is to be general.

4. The obedience of faith exactly describes the human faculty as it showed itself in St. Paul himself at his conversion. With him to believe was, without any possibility of question, to obey Him whom he believed, and St. Paul knows no faith which does not involve a like obedience; cf. xv. 18; xvi. 26; 1 Pet. i. 2.

CHAPTER I. 8-17.
St. Paul's introduction

The salutation is immediately followed by a passage in which St. Paul introduces himself specially to the Christians at Rome. He had a delicate task to perform. The Roman Christians had been gathered probably from many parts of the empire, because Rome was the centre of all the world's movements, and adherents of whatever was going on in the empire were sure by force of circumstances to find their way to Rome. Thus, though no apostle had yet preached at Rome, Christians had gathered there. Many of them had not seen St. Paul's face. But they had heard of him, no doubt, in Jewish circles as a very dangerous man who was upheaving and subverting established traditions and principles. He was a man to be looked at askance. He must introduce himself therefore carefully. It was of the greatest importance to him, the Apostle of the Gentiles, that he should gain full recognition among these Christians at Rome, the centre of the Gentile world. We observe then in this introduction what a gentleman, if I may say so, in the very deepest sense of the term, St. Paul shows himself to be. He speaks indeed with an admirable mixture of tact and candour. We can hardly conceive any better address in a delicate situation than this address of St. Paul with which he makes his approach to the Roman Christians.

He begins with what is pleasant for them to hear, namely, that the report of their faith throughout all the world is a good one. 'I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.' Then he goes on to add, as is usual in his introductions, that he continually prays for them. It was a remark of General Gordon's that it makes a great difference in our feeling towards a stranger if before we meet him we have prayed for him. And we may with equal truth say that it makes a great difference in the feelings of others towards us if they have reason to believe that we have prayed for them. St. Paul therefore gives himself this advantage. He says, 'God is my witness, whom I worship in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers.' Then he goes on to tell them that he not only prays for their welfare, but prays that he may have the advantage of seeing them face to face and knowing them. And here he puts his desire to see them on the true ground. He wants to visit them because he has something of the utmost value to give them – that he may 'impart unto them some spiritual gift.'

Whatever may be the exact nature of the 'spiritual gift' St. Paul is thinking of, it is clearly something for which his bodily presence is necessary. There is some divine power which he as an apostle can communicate to them only when he comes among them. In this sense he means that 'when he comes to them he will come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ[54].' He

[54] Rom. xv. 29.

implies that the Roman Christians needed him and must wait for him to supply their deficiencies. But we observe that with beautiful tact he at once balances this assertion of a divine power entrusted to him for their good, by representing his own need of them. He does not speak *de haut en bas* as if he had everything to give and nothing to receive. No: as the people depend on the apostle for spiritual gifts, so he depends on the people for spiritual encouragement. He must live by the experience of their spiritual growth. 'I desire,' he says, 'to come to you that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established' (built up and made strong in the faith). And then he interprets: – that is 'in order that I with you may be encouraged[55] among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.'

Then he goes on to tell them why he in particular is bound to come to them, though hitherto he had been hindered by circumstances. It is because he is 'a debtor.' St. Paul was the Apostle, not of the Jews, but of the Gentiles. Therefore he is in debt to all the Gentiles till he has given them the gospel, and more particularly to the centre of the Gentile world, to Rome. And he would owe no man anything. He would have no unsatisfied creditors. He will pay his debt therefore to the Roman Christians. 'I am a debtor,' he says, 'both to Greeks and to barbarians' – that is to all the Gentiles, whether they were of Greek race or not. And the Greeks were so identified with civilization or education

[55] 'To encourage' and 'encouragement' are probably the best words to translate what in our Bible is rendered by 'comfort.'

that this leads him on to say, 'I am a debtor both to the educated and to the uneducated.' This general debt includes Rome. It was natural to include the dwellers at Rome under the head of Greeks, for it was through the medium of Greek that St. Paul made his appeal to them. And, in fact, the Christians at Rome were, for the first two hundred and fifty years or more of the Church's life, a Greek-speaking people – a Greek colony in the Latin city. Only towards the end of the third century did the Roman Church become latinized in language and spirit. St. Paul then is a debtor to these Greek-speaking dwellers at Rome. 'So as much as in me is I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome.'

But the name of Rome was, as he thought of it, a name of awe. It brought in upon his mind the tremendous undertaking that lay before him and before the Christian Church as they found themselves confronted with this vast imperial organization, which might at any time lay its iron hand upon them to stop their progress. Therefore he adds that, even in view of Rome, he has courage in his heart: 'for I am not ashamed of the gospel,' even under the shadow of the mighty name, and though it was 'to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.' And why? Because he knows what the gospel means. It is not mere words; it is a power. It is a 'power of God,' a divine force, which, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth, and which nothing can stop. It is a power of God. It is a power of God 'unto salvation,' a power that is to work men's deliverance, and that in the deepest sense. Roman emperors not very long after St. Paul's time are

commemorated in public inscriptions as 'saviours of the world[56].' That is in the sense of maintaining peace and civil order. But Christ's salvation was of a deeper sort. It was salvation from the bondage of sin, a salvation which enabled people to be truly and eternally free. It is a power of God unto salvation, and that 'to every one that believeth,' on the mere basis of the simple willingness to take God at His word; 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek.' 'For' – and here St. Paul reaches the great text of his whole epistle – 'therein' (that is, in the gospel) 'is disclosed,' or revealed here and now in the world, 'a righteousness of God.' By this phrase it will appear that he means both a righteousness which is God's own, and also a righteousness which God gives to men; for the gift of God is real moral and spiritual fellowship with His own life. This is what is now offered to men. A righteousness of God is revealed, starting from faith and at every stage moving on upon the support of faith, 'a righteousness of God by faith unto faith'; and that not in repudiation of the old covenant, but in fulfilment of its vital principle: 'as it is written.' For the words of Habakkuk may be interpreted to express the central spirit of the Old Testament – 'the righteous shall live by faith[57].'

> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all that your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world.

---

[56] Hadrian and Trajan: see *C.I.G.* vol. ii. p. 1068, No. 2349 m.; vol. iii. p. 170, No. 4339, p. 191, No. 4380. These references I owe to Mr. H. W. B. Joseph, of New College.

[57] Hab. ii. 4; cf. app. note A on meanings of the word 'faith.'

> For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if by any means now at length I may be prospered by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I with you may be comforted in you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine. And I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (and was hindered hitherto), that I might have some fruit in you also, even as in the rest of the Gentiles. I am debtor both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith.

1. Origen's comment on the words 'through Jesus Christ' (at the beginning of this section) is very interesting. 'To give God thanks is to offer a sacrifice of praise, and therefore he adds "through Jesus Christ," as through the great high priest.' Indeed, the doctrine of the high priesthood of Christ, if it is not mentioned in St. Paul's own epistles, is implied there from the first.

2. St. Paul, we notice, expresses his intention to come to Rome with reserve, 'if by any means by the will of God' … 'so much

as lies in me.' And this reserve was no matter of mere words. He was going up to Jerusalem with an offering of money, about which he felt the greatest anxiety, and he knew not how he would be received, or what would befall him[58].

3. It is not possible to decide what sort of 'spiritual gift' St. Paul is thinking of. We know that as an apostle he was qualified to impart the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands, and that certain 'gifts' frequently accompanied His inward presence. Thus, 'when Paul had laid his hands upon some men at Ephesus, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied.' We know, further, that the Corinthian Church, whence St. Paul was writing this letter, was specially rich in 'spiritual gifts,' such as 'tongues and prophecy.' On the other hand, the Roman Christians had not yet received an apostolic visit and they may have been lacking in such endowments, while the reception of them would be calculated to encourage them and strengthen their faith.

It is possible, therefore, that he refers to a gift of this kind, and the exact language he uses certainly suggests some definite endowment, for the bestowal of which his bodily presence was necessary. The thought of the miraculous power working through him, 'the power of signs and wonders, the power of the Holy Ghost[59],' was not far from his mind when he wrote this epistle.

Origen's comment on this passage also is interesting. 'First of

---

[58] Rom. xv. 25 ff.; Acts xx. 22.

[59] Rom. xv. 19.

all we ought to learn that it is an apostolic work to long to see our brethren, but for no other reason than that we may confer on them something in the way of a spiritual gift if we can, and if we cannot, that we may receive in the same kind from them. Otherwise, the longing to go about among the brethren is not to be approved.'

We cannot doubt, I think, that when St. Paul's letter was read at Rome this introduction, so full of tact, would have given him access to many hearts inclined at starting to be prejudiced against him.

DIVISION I.
(CHAPTERS I. 18-III. 20.)
The universality of sin and condemnation

St. Paul has enunciated his great thesis. There has arrived into the world a new and divine force making for man's fullest salvation: the disclosure of a real fellowship in the moral being of God, which is open to all men, Jew and Gentile equally, on the simple terms of taking God at His word. This word of good tidings St. Paul is to expand and justify in his epistle; but first he must pause and explain its antecedents. Why was such a disclosure needed at this moment of the world's history? Why has St. Paul spoken of 'salvation,' or why does he elsewhere speak of 'redemption,' instead of expressing such ideas as are most popular among ourselves to-day – development or progress? It is because, to St. Paul's mind, man as he is is held in a bondage which he ought to find intolerable, and the first step to freedom lies in the recognition of this. Again, why does St. Paul lay such emphasis on faith, mere faith, only faith – why is he to insist so zealously on the exclusion of any merit or independent power on man's part? It is not only because faith, the faculty of mere reception and correspondence, represents the normal and rational

relation of man to God, his Creator, Sustainer, Father. It is also, and with special emphasis, because there has been a great revolt, a great assertion of false independence on man's part; and what is needed first of all is the submission of the rebel, or much rather the return of the prodigal son, simply to throw himself on the mercy of his Father and acknowledge his utter dependence upon Him for the forgiveness of his disloyalty and his outrages, as well as for the fellowship which he seeks in the divine life. The fuller statement therefore of St. Paul's gospel must be postponed to the uncloaking of what man is without it. The note of severity must be struck before the message of joy. We must be brought to acknowledge ourselves to be not men only, but corrupt men – men under the divine wrath – doomed men powerless to deliver ourselves, and ready therefore to welcome in simple gratitude the large offer of God's liberal and almost unconditional love.

It is to produce this acknowledgement that St. Paul now addresses himself. This argument of the first part of the epistle is a very simple one. It elucidates two plain propositions: —

1. that the wrath of God is, and is necessarily according to eternal and unalterable principles of moral government, and in the case of every man without any possibility of exception, upon sin.

2. that all men, Jews and Gentiles, are held in sin, and therefore lie under the divine wrath.

Thus St. Paul immediately follows up his initial statement of the revelation of a divine righteousness with the assertion

of another 'revelation' made plain to the consciences of men. 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,' and he proceeds to demonstrate the prevalence of sin first of all in the heathen world and to lay bare its meaning.

DIVISION I. § I.
(CHAPTER I. 18-32).
Judgement on the Gentile world

Before we read this passage certain points should be plain to our minds.

1. By sin St. Paul means essentially wilfulness – wilful disobedience. There is such a thing as an inheritance of moral weakness or perversity which passes to men without their fault and without their knowledge. This, the real existence of which hardly any one can deny, is what is called original sin; and later on we shall find St. Paul speaking of it. But it is not what is most properly called sin. God is absolutely equitable. 'Sin is not reckoned' as sin in His sight, apart from knowledge and will. Sin, most properly speaking, begins and ends where wilful disobedience begins and ends. St. Paul on this matter is completely at one with St. John when he makes sin and lawlessness identical as realities in the world. 'Sin is lawlessness[60].' And we cannot even make a beginning of advance along St. Paul's line of thought till we recognize the real existence of sin as something different in kind from ignorance or weakness or lack of development, and as an incomparably greater evil than

[60] 1 John iii. 4. The Greek phrase implies exactly that all sin is lawlessness, and all lawlessness is sin.

those. Sin is the created will setting itself against the divine will. It is, as a state or an act, the refusal of God. And the recognition of the awful existence of this refusal of God is the main clue to understanding the miseries of the present world.

2. Sin therefore, involving as it does *wilful* disobedience, can only be spoken of as prevalent over the heathen world because, not merely one chosen race, but all men in general have had the opportunity of the knowledge of God. St. Paul indeed elsewhere modifies the general assertion of the fact which he makes in this place, by broadly recognizing that there are states of human existence which are low in their moral standard, but are rendered comparatively guiltless by the absence of moral knowledge – states of life where sin exists but is not reckoned as sin[61]. For 'sin,' he says, 'is not reckoned' as sin where there is no enlightening law and no consequent condemnation of conscience. But in this passage, looking at humanity in general, he asserts, like the author of the Book of Wisdom or the perhaps contemporary Jewish author of the Apocalypse of Baruch[62], that all men have

[61] Rom. v. 13, 14.

[62] Cf. Wisd. xiii. 1-9: 'For verily all men by nature were but vain who had no perception of God, and from the good things that are seen they gained not power to know him that is, neither by giving heed to the works did they recognize the artificer… For from the greatness of the beauty even of created things in like proportion does man form the image of their first maker… But again even they are not to be excused. For if they had power to know so much … how is it that they did not sooner find the Sovereign Lord of these his works?' Apoc. Bar. liv. 17, 18: 'From time to time ye have rejected the understanding of the Most High. For his works have not taught you, nor has the skill of his creation which is at all times persuaded you.'

had the opportunity of knowing God from His works in nature, and that their present state is the result of a wilful refusal of Him. They are 'without excuse.' The sources of the natural knowledge of God are indeed twofold, for there is the moral conscience, individual and social, of which St. Paul speaks later; but here it is the evidence of nature alone of which St. Paul speaks: the witness of the creatures to 'the invisible things' or attributes of their creator, that is to say, to His power and (generally) His divinity.

3. Assuming then the opportunity of the knowledge of God as lying behind human records, St. Paul traces the history of sin. It had its roots in the refusal of the human will to recognize God and give Him the homage of gratitude and service due to Him. Men 'held down the truth in unrighteousness,' that is, restrained it from having free course in their hearts and in the world because of the painful moral obligations which it involves. Knowing God, they refused to acknowledge Him with thankfulness or 'give Him the glory.' Rather they would themselves 'be as gods.' They 'refused to have God in their knowledge.' Then from this root in the rebel will sin passed to the obscuring of the understanding, as is shown in the ridiculous aberrations of idolatry. 'They became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise,' the nations in their worship showed themselves fools. Idolatry had long ago appeared simply ridiculous to Isaiah: he pointed the finger of scorn at the idolaters. 'They know not,' he cried, 'neither do they consider: the

Lord hath shut their eyes that they cannot see, and their hearts that they cannot understand. And none calleth to mind, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of the wood in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand[63]?' Isaiah's language and thought had been elaborated and developed in the Book of Wisdom[64], and St. Paul appropriates it. To mistake creatures for the Creator, or to think of the glorious and spiritual God as if He were in the form of the corruptible body of man or beast or bird or reptile – so St. Paul alludes to the man worship of Greece and the animal worship of Egypt – is simple blindness and folly; blindness and folly in which St. Paul sees the just punishment of the rebellious will in the region of the intellect. But it has another punishment in the region of the appetites or passions. As men deliberately 'repudiated' the knowledge and obedience of God, God 'repudiated' men in penal retribution. He gave them up to become vile in their own eyes and to find out their impotence to control their own lusts. They ran riot even in all sorts of unnatural and lawless ways,

[63] Isa. xliv. 18-20.

[64] Wisd. xi. 15; xiii, xiv, xv. St. Paul's debt to the Book of Wisdom is apparent (1) in the kinds of idols he mentions; (2) in the way in which the thought of idolatry leads on to that of uncleanness and sexual immorality; and (3) in the idea of retribution by the natural law of results.

so that the world became full of sins of all kinds; sins against God and sins against man; antisocial sins of all sorts, the sins which destroy the state and friendship and commerce and the home: and at the last the very ideal of righteousness had come to be lost. St. Paul, we notice, makes the lowest moral stage of all to consist, not in merely doing these wicked things, but in abandoning all distaste for them – consenting unrestrainedly to those who do them; and this profoundly true remark explains the moral impotence of much that is from other points of view excellent in Greek literature.

4. For the punishment of all this sin St. Paul is not content to look to the 'day of judgement,' though that is to be the final and characteristic expression of divine wrath, and that 'day of wrath' he still probably anticipated in the more immediate future; but he sees already in the actual world of human society as he knows it the manifold evidence of the divine wrath here and now. Men are receiving in themselves the fitting reward of their perversity. Their life has found its own punishment. The divine wrath is actually disclosed in the facts of experience. 'Look,' St. Paul seems to say, 'at the way men are living, and ask yourselves if there is any interpretation but one of the facts you see. There is but one conclusion possible. God has condemned and is showing His wrath on the human nature which He made.' Just in the same way in an earlier epistle St. Paul speaks of the Jews, even before the destruction of Jerusalem, as already judged, already the

subject of the divine wrath[65]. And God's method of judgement is this. The punishment lies in the natural consequences of the lawless actions. The wages of sin is also its fruit[66]. And further, this punishment of sin involves the increased liability to sin again. One sin 'gives us over' to another, as one good action facilitates another. This idea was familiar to Jewish teachers. Among the 'sayings of the Fathers' we find, 'Every fulfilment of duty is rewarded by another, and every transgression is punished by another[67].' St. Paul, in fact, in this chapter, may be said to be concentrating for the Christian Church all that is best and deepest in the moral philosophy of Judaism.

Now we are in a position to read the first section of St. Paul's argument without perhaps finding any single idea to the interpretation of which we have not a clue.

> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, *even* his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse: because that, knowing God, they glorified him not as God, neither gave thanks; but became vain in their reasonings, and

[65] 1 Thess. ii. 16.

[66] Butler's *Analogy*, part i. ch. 2.

[67] *Pirqé Aboth*, iv. 2 (cited by S. and H.).

their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonoured among themselves: for that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was due.

And even as they refused to have God in *their* knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, hateful to God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, unmerciful: who, knowing the ordinance of God, that they which practise such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but also consent with them that practise them.

1. Perhaps the first question which arises in our minds when

reading this passage is, whether St. Paul's general account of the heathen world is not unjustifiably severe. Does he not paint it too black? In fact, the account he gives coincides with the account given by other Jews of the Gentile world as in their experience they found it; and this, we must remember, means the Gentile world of the great cities of the empire. They thought, as they moved about the world and saw what they could not but see, that God had forsaken the Gentiles because they refused to acknowledge His law. There was sin enough in Israel, but it was remediable. The sin of the Gentiles was irremediable. God had forsaken them[68]. This last idea is of course one entirely alien to St. Paul's mind. To him all God's judgements, at least in this world, have one intention – to awaken men to recognize the truth and to stir them to conversion, 'that he may have mercy upon all.' But otherwise St. Paul's view of the Gentile world, as he experienced it in the cities of mixed Greek and Asiatic population of the Roman Empire, and especially in the notoriously wicked Corinth where he was writing[69], was the ordinary Jewish view. And a contemporary Stoic philosopher, who wrote at Ephesus under the name of Heracleitus, gives a picture of society in that city fully as black[70].

At the same time, if we are to be fair, we must recognize that

---

[68] S. and H. p. 49.

[69] He implies, as Dr. Farrar points out, 1 Cor. v. 9-10, that pure society did not exist in Corinth.

[70] See my *Ephesians*, pp. 91, 92, 255.

the account, while true, is not complete. The Gentile life was not without its 'salt.' There was a great deal of virtue, both domestic and philosophical, in the empire – more perhaps in the country, of which St. Paul knew little, than in the towns. And the existence of this salt he acknowledges when, in the second chapter of this epistle, he speaks of Gentiles which have no revealed law but do by nature the things of law, being a law unto themselves, and having the effect of the law written in their hearts, and a witnessing conscience, individual and social, to help them[71]: and again, when he intimates that there is an uncircumcision which puts the circumcision to shame by keeping the law[72]. But it is not St. Paul's way to exactly correlate the different aspects of his subject as a modern writer would do. He is a prophet and preacher, not a formally systematic writer. It is enough for him that the sin which he is describing is a reality: that its tendencies are what he describes them to be: that, whatever other counter tendency there may be, sin is so dominant in the world that its results are as he represents them, and that the conscience and experience of those to whom he writes will respond to his indictment.

Nor, if we give its metaphorical meaning to 'idolatry,' is there a word which St. Paul says in this chapter which would not be true of our modern civilization in London or Paris or New York. With us indeed Christianity has been sufficiently vigorous to

[71] Rom. ii. 13-15.

[72] Rom. ii. 26.

provide a counteracting force, of infinitely stronger power than existed in the Roman world, to resist corruption. The agencies of divine strength and recovery, the centres of health and light, are infinitely more numerous, stronger, more constant, more progressive. But the world of sin is still what it was: and always there lies upon it the same stamp of the divine condemnation. We look around on the life of our city, with its selfish and disgusting lusts, with its drunkenness, with its enervating luxury, with its selfish wealth, with its reckless and immoral gambling, with its dishonest commerce, with its grasping avarice so neglectful of the lives of those whom it makes its instruments: we look round, I say, not on the whole life, but on the sinful life of our city, and we see what human nature is plainly meant not to be, either in its characteristics or in its miserable issues. And by the interval between what we see life to be and what we know it was meant to be, we can measure the reality of the divine judgement. The facts press upon us the truth which St. Paul would teach. The sinful life is a condemned life. Here is an actual disclosure of the wrath of God upon all unrighteousness and sin.

2. But what will 'science' say to St. Paul's account of human degeneracy and degradation? Does not St. Paul seem to talk, as moralists in general have been disposed to talk, as if the course of the world's history had been a downward course? and is not this the religious view? and is it not directly opposed to the scientific view of a gradual process of development and advance? This is a very common form of question to suggest itself to our minds.

And the answer to it appears to be this[73]: – The biblical view of the world is not by any means that as a whole it has gone from bad to worse. It recognizes periods and areas of degradation, and suggests periods and areas of stagnation. And this is what anthropology and history equally suggest. But its main concern is with the history of one particular line of human advancement under divine guidance through Abraham and Moses and prophets and kings, through Christ and His Church: an advancement which is to be finally world-wide, and even more than world-wide, in its effects. Other lines of progress in civilization and knowledge the Bible recognizes but is not largely concerned with. But it is in its general effect thoroughly in accord with science, which suggests not general and equable advance over the whole region of humanity, but advance in special departments along the line of select races, continually impeded in its progress by counter tendencies, by periods and areas of degradation, and still more of stagnation[74]. Science, indeed, utters no word of promise at all as to the ultimate result of all this evolution[75]. It is faith, of

---

[73] See also app. note E on physical science and the fall.

[74] Cf. F. B. Jevons, *Introd. to the Hist. of Religion* (Methuen), pp. 394, 395: 'Everywhere it is the many who lapse: the few who hold right on. The progressive peoples of the earth are in a minority.' 'Though evolution is universal, progress is exceptional.'

[75] Cf. Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics* (Romanes Lecture, 1893, Macmillan), p. 36: 'The theory of evolution encourages no millennial anticipations. If, for millions of years, our globe has taken the upward road, yet, some time, the summit will be reached, and the downward route will be commenced.'

whatsoever sort, not science, that can make us optimistic as to the issue of human history.

But no doubt the Bible does throughout postulate the existence of sin; and it claims that sin everywhere, and from the first, has been a cause of degradation in the individual and the race. Now here is the real point at issue in the relations of religion and science. The main question is not about human origins or a primaeval fall. It is simply on the comparatively easy field of actual human existence. Is human freedom – freedom within limits to choose and act – a reality? Can man therefore misuse this freedom to do what he need not have done and ought not to have done? And has he, in fact, constantly been doing morally wrong things, wilfully and knowingly, which he need not have done? Does, therefore, the area of human history present at every stage a result or product which human wilfulness and lawlessness, that is, sin, has contributed to spoil and to degrade below its natural level? Now it is this – the real existence of countless human actions which need not have been and ought not to have been – which contemporary science, with a necessitarian bias, is largely occupied in denying. Granted the reality within limits – limits which have no doubt often been grossly exaggerated, but granted the reality within due limits – of human freedom, and therefore the possibility and reality of actual sin and guilt and degradation which need not have been, I do not believe there remains any serious conflict in the moral region between religion and science. The conflict, I say, is continually being taken back

into the region of original sin or the original fall. But this is a quite secondary area of debate, in which I believe there can be no serious disagreement, if there is agreement in the primary area of actual human sin. The universal moral consciousness and common sense of man bears witness to the fact that we can do and do do what we ought and need not. It recognizes, moreover, the moral truth of St. Paul's idea that this lawlessness of the will has its perverting effects on the intelligence and on the passions. The human conscience then responds to St. Paul's account of the origin and history of human sin, and of its fruits both in the individual and in society. And if psychological science is inclined to deny the very existence of any faculty of free choice such as makes sin possible, it will be found on examination to be going very far beyond what it can prove. For the reality of guilt and sin, and the degradation which results from it, we have the human consciousness; against it we have no positive evidence: nothing in fact but the habitual unwillingness of specialist science, physical or theological, to recognize its limits.

3. St. Paul finds the root of sin in the refusal of man in general to recognize God. He asserts that they might have known Him, or rather did know Him, but declined to act on that knowledge. Now it is noticeable that he does not ascribe this knowledge of God, which he declares to have been possible to man everywhere, to an original revelation, nor even in this place to the moral conscience, but to the evidence of nature. In this, as in his ridicule of idolatry, he is in accordance, not only with Jewish thought,

but with contemporary Greek philosophy. The argument from design had become habitual in the schools, having been stated first of all with transparent simplicity by Xenophon in his account of the reasoning of Socrates. St. Paul then finds in this instinctive inference from nature up to nature's God, 'a testimony of the soul naturally Christian.' He is able, at Lystra and Athens, to assume that men will respond to it.

It is another question, into which St. Paul does not specifically enter, how far back in human history the appreciation of this reasoning goes. But it is worth noticing that among our contemporary investigators of the history of religion, some at least of the most acute have been coming back to what we may call a modified form of the doctrine of an original monotheism[76]. They think that even savage religions generally bear traces, that are plainly independent, of a belief in one great and mostly good God; and that there is no evidence that this higher belief was developed out of the lower belief in manifold spirits of more ambiguous characters. They see no reason to suppose that the higher belief has been gradually arrived at within any period into which the human mind can penetrate with its investigations or its well-grounded conjectures. Humanity appears to them to have been haunted from its origins with this belief in the one God;

[76] The allusion is to (1) Jevons (*op. cit.* cap. xxv), who seems to think some 'amorphous' form of monotheism may very probably lie behind totemism. He strongly repudiates the notion that the lower form is necessarily the older. (2) Andrew Lang, *Making of Religion* (Longmans, 1898), chaps. ix and xv. Cp. also Orr's *Christian view of God and the World* (Elliot, 1893), pp. 212 ff., and notes E, F, G.

and they regard all the higher religious movements as attempts not so much to arrive at, as to retain hold on, a belief which is continually in danger of being overlaid and forgotten. It does not appear that anthropological science is at all likely to disprove such a view which on the other hand has a great deal of evidence to justify it. At least, the evidences of deterioration in the history of religion are manifold and conspicuous. The lowest view of God and man is not by any means always the oldest. And the recognition of such facts is quite consonant with the doctrine of the evolution of religion in its more reasonable forms.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.