

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY.

XII. THE MORAL ENERGY OF FAITH.

EARNESTLY bent on reconciling his gospel with all the three interests covered by his apologetic, the apostle was specially anxious to show that his doctrine was not open to objection on the score of moral tendency. It was quite natural that he should be exceptionally sensitive on this subject, not only because he was himself a morally earnest man keenly alive to the supreme importance of right conduct as the ultimate test of the truth of all theories, and of the worth of all religions, but more especially because it was at this point that his system might plausibly be represented as weakest. How easy to caricature his anti-nomianism as a licentious thing which cancelled all moral demands, and set the believer in Jesus free to do as he liked, to sin if he pleased, without fear, because grace abounded! It is not improbable that such misconstruction was actually put by disaffected persons on the Pauline gospel; it is only too likely that some members of the various churches founded by the apostle's preaching, by the unholiness of their lives, supplied a plausible excuse for misrepresentation. In any case both these phenomena were *a priori* to be expected. On all grounds, therefore, it was most needful that the doctrine of justification by faith in God's free grace should be cleared of all suspicion in reference to its practical tendency.

As already pointed out, the Pauline apologetic offers two lines of defence for this purpose, the one based on the moral energy of faith, the other on the sanctifying influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The first line of defence falls now to be considered.

Faith, as St. Paul conceives it, is a mighty principle,

possessing a plurality of virtues, and capable of doing more things than one. For him, as for the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is the mother of heroic achievements, and can not only please God, but enable men to make their lives morally sublime. It is, in his view, as good for sanctification as for justification. Therefore, his programme, as formulated in *Galatians* v. 5, is: faith alone for all purposes, for the obtainment of righteousness in every sense; not merely righteousness objective, or God's pardoning grace, but righteousness subjective, or personal holiness. In this notable text *δικαιοσύνης* is an objective genitive—"the hope whose object is righteousness"—and the righteousness hoped for is *subjective*, an inward personal righteousness realizing the moral ideal. That the apostle does sometimes use the term *δικαιοσύνη* in a subjective sense is unquestionable. We have clear instances of such use in *Romans* viii. 10: "if Christ be in you, the body is indeed dead on account of sin, but the spirit is life on account of righteousness"; and *Romans* vi. 16-20, especially ver. 18: "being freed from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." On enquiry it will be found that the subjective sense prevails chiefly, as we might expect in apologetic passages, where the apostle is concerned to vindicate for his doctrine a wholesome ethical tendency. On this principle *Galatians* v. 5 must be regarded as one of the texts in which *δικαιοσύνη* bears a subjective meaning. For in the context the writer is engaged in combating a religious theory of life on which the Galatian churches seem to have been, perhaps half unconsciously, acting, viz., that while faith might be good for the initial stage of the Christian life it was of little or no avail for the more advanced stages, whose needs must be met by a methodized system of legal observances. Against this patchwork theory what should we expect the champion of antilegalist Christianity to say? This: "faith is good for all stages, beginning, middle, and

end; for all purposes, to make us holy, as well as to obtain pardon; it is the only thing that is good for holiness. Circumcision is good for nothing, and of equally little avail is the whole elaborate system of ritual, which legal doctors inculcate upon you." This accordingly is just what the apostle does say in the text *Galatians* v. 5, 6, if we take righteousness in a subjective sense as equivalent to holiness: "we, right-minded, right-thinking Christians, in the spirit, from faith, expect the hope of holiness, for in Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working by love." It tends to confirm this interpretation that righteousness is here represented as an object of hope. Righteousness is set forth as the goal of Christian hope, which the apostle and all who agree with him expect to reach from faith, that is on the footing of faith, with faith as their guide all through. Obviously this goal of righteousness is synonymous with Christian holiness, conformity to the moral ideal. One other fact supporting the foregoing interpretation is the description of faith in the last clause of v. 6, as *energising through love* (δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη). How far the description is true is a question to be considered; the point now insisted on is that such an account of faith is relevant only if faith be viewed as a sanctifying influence, as conducive to *subjective* righteousness.¹

This then is the Pauline programme: from faith *justification*, *i.e.* righteousness in the objective sense; from faith also the hope of *holiness*, *i.e.* righteousness in the subjective sense. But by what right does the apostle repose such unbounded confidence in faith as the principle of a new life of Christian sanctity? He gives two answers to this

¹ Holsten (*Das Evangelium des Paulus*) endorses this view. He says "that here *δικαιοσύνη* refers not to objective righteousness but to subjective righteousness of life is shown by the connection and the grounding of *δικαιοσύνη* on the spirit." (p. 173.)

question at least formally distinct; one in the text just quoted, wherein faith is described as energetic through love; the other in that earlier text in *Galatians*, wherein faith is also described as making the believer one with Christ,¹ a line of thought which is resumed and expanded in *Romans* vi.

The former of these two views of faith exhibits it as a powerful, practical force, which works mightily, and in the best way, from the highest motive, love. The attribute denoted by *ἐνεργουμένη*, guarantees the requisite life force, the motive denoted by the expression *δι' ἀγάπης* insures the pure quality of the action produced thereby. The allegations are obviously most relevant to the argument. For if faith be really an energetic principle, and if it do indeed work from love as its motive, then we may expect from its presence in the soul right conduct of the highest order. Out of the energy of faith will spring all sorts of right works, and those works will not be vitiated by base motive, as in religions of fear, in connection with which superstitious dread of God proves itself not less mighty than faith, but mighty to malign effects, making men even give of the very fruit of their body for the sin of their soul. The only question therefore remaining is: are the apostle's statements concerning faith true? is faith an energetic force? does it work from love as its motive?

There should be no hesitation in admitting the truth of both statements. That faith is an energetic principle all human experience attests. Faith, no matter what its object, ever shows itself mighty as a propeller to action. If a man believe a certain enterprise to be possible and worthy, his faith will stir him up to persistent effort for its achievement. The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews settles the question as to the might inherent in faith. In this might all faith shares, therefore, the faith of

¹ *Gal.* ii. 20.

Christians in God. But why should the faith of Christians work by *love*? Why not by some other motive, say fear, which has been such a potent factor in the religious history of mankind? Is there any intrinsic necessary connection between Christian faith and love? There is, and it is due to the Christian idea of God. *All turns on that.* The God of our faith is a God of *grace*. He is our Father in heaven, and we, however unworthy, are His children. Therefore our faith inevitably works by love. First and obviously by the love of gratitude for mercy received. For, whereas the question of a religion of fear is: wherewithal shall I come before the Lord that I may appease His wrath, faith speaketh in this wise: what shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits? But not through the love of gratitude alone; also through the love of adoration for the highest conceivable ethical ideal realized in the Divine nature. God is love, benignant, self-communicating, self-sacrificing. To believe in such a God is to make love, similar in spirit, if limited in capacity, the law of life. Hence the necessity for taking care that our developed theologies and our theories of atonement do not make whole-hearted faith in such a God difficult or impossible. All theologies which have this result are suicidal, and secure a barren orthodoxy at the expense of Christlike heroic character and noble conduct.

The apostle's conception of the Christian faith as energetic through love [is thus in harmony at once with the general nature of faith as a principle in the human mind, and with the specific nature of the Christian religion. But the boldness with which he gave utterance to this conception really sprang out of his own experience. His own faith was of this description; hence his unbounded confidence in the power of faith to work out the problem of salvation from sin. And his life as a Christian is the justification of his confidence; for if we may judge of faith's sufficiency for the

task assigned to it in the Pauline system by the character and career of the Apostle of the Gentiles, then we may, without hesitation, give in our adherence to the watchword, FAITH ALONE. Testing the formula by the common phenomena of religious life, we might very excusably pause before adopting it. Two classes of phenomena are of frequent occurrence. One is the combination of the standing-ground of faith with various forms of legalism. The other is the more incongruous combination of evangelic faith with vulgar morality or, worse still, with immorality. The former combination, exhibited in one form or another in every generation, and in every branch of the Church, may seem to prove that the programme, faith alone for all purposes, is generally found by devout souls unworkable. From the latter combination it may plausibly be inferred that the proclamation from the housetop of the Pauline programme is dangerous to morals.

Now, as to the combination of faith and legalism, it must be sorrowfully admitted that it always has been, and still is, very prevalent. History attests that it has ever been found a hard thing to remain standing on the platform of free grace. Downcome from that high level to a lower, from grace to law, from faith to technical "good works," from liberty to bondage, seems to be a matter of course in religious experience, individual and collective. What happened in Galatia repeats itself from age to age, and in all churches. Legalism in some form recurs with the regularity of a law of nature. The fact raises a preliminary presumption against the Pauline programme which must be faced. How, then, are we to reconcile the fact with the all-sufficiency of faith? We shall best do this by taking into account the law of growth in the kingdom of God, enunciated by our Lord in the parable of the blade, the ear, and the ripe corn. Legalism is a characteristic of the stage of the green ear, in the spiritual life of the individual and of the community.

The blossom and the ripe fruit, the beginning and the end of a normal Christian experience, exhibit the beauty of pure evangelic faith. The green fruit is a lapse from the simplicity of the beginning, a lapse which is at the same time a step in advance, as it prepares the way for a higher stage, in which evangelic faith shall reappear victorious over the legal spirit of fear, distrust, and self-reliance. If this be true, and it is verified at once by Church history and by religious biography, then the apostle's programme is vindicated; for we must test his principle by the end of Christian growth, and by the beginning, which is a foreshadowment of the end, not by the intermediate stage, in which morbid elements appear, the only value of which is that they supply a discipline which makes the heart glad to return again to the simplicity of trust. Judge Paulinism by its author, not by his degenerate successors; by the Reformers, not by the scholastic theologians of the seventeenth century; by the men in whom the spirit of the Reformation reappeared at the close of the dreary period of Protestant scholasticism, terminating in universal doubt; by men like Bengel in Germany, and Chalmers in Scotland, whose faith was not a mere tradition from the fathers, and, as such, a feeble degenerate thing, but a fresh revelation from heaven to their own souls. True evangelic faith cannot be a tradition; in the very act of becoming such, what passes for evangelic faith degenerates into a legalism which brings the way of faith into discredit.

Passing now to the other phenomenon, the combination of evangelic faith, so-called, with a low moral tone, what shall we say to it? Does it not prove that there is a real risk of the Pauline doctrine not only failing to promote sanctification, but even becoming perverted into a corrupting, demoralizing influence? It certainly does show that there is serious risk of abuse, through the unworthiness of men who turn the grace of God into licentiousness. But

Divine grace is not the only good thing that is liable to be abused. And in other matters men guard against abuse as best they can, still holding on to the legitimate use. Even so must we act in reference to the matter of salvation by faith in Divine grace. We must refuse to be put out of conceit with that way to spiritual life and health by a counterfeit, hypocritical, immoral evangelicism. We must reckon the principle of the Pauline gospel a thing so good as to be worth running risks for, and continue to adhere to it in spite of all drawbacks. We may not be ashamed of the motto on our banner because a rascally mob follows in the rear repeating our watchword, and shouting, "We will rejoice in Thy salvation." Think of the men who constitute the real body of the army, the people who give themselves willingly to the noble fight against evil, clothed in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning; men of the stamp of Luther, Knox, Wishart, who were as the dew of Christ's youth in the morning of the Reformation. May we not bear with equanimity the presence in the church of some worthless counterfeits, orthodox worldlings, selfish saints, hypocritical schemers, and the like, for the sake of such a noble race of men? May we not patiently see some using Christian liberty for an occasion to the flesh, when we recognise in such simply the abuse of a principle whose native tendency is to produce men like-minded with St. Paul; men taking their stand resolutely on grace, not because they desire to evade moral responsibilities, but because they hope to get the hunger of their spirit for righteousness filled, and to be enabled to rise to heights of moral attainment otherwise inaccessible; men passionately bent on being freed from every species of degrading, hampering bondage, specially jealous of all religious fetters, yet desiring freedom only for holy ends, ridding themselves of "dead works" that they may serve God in a new living, devoted way? Such, beyond doubt, is the kind of men thorough-

going faith in Divine grace tends to produce ; and if there are fewer such men in the church than one could wish, it is because the faith professed is not earnestly held, or held in its purity, but is mingled with some subtle element of legalism which prevents it from having its full effect.

After what has been said in a former paper,¹ it will not be necessary to expatiate on the other source of faith's sanctifying power, the fellowship which it establishes between the believer and Christ. However mystic and transcendental this fellowship may appear to some minds, it will not be denied that in proportion as it is realized in any Christian experience it must prove a powerful stimulus to Christlike living. No man can, like the apostle, think of himself as dying, rising, and ascending with Christ without being stirred up to strenuous effort after moral heroism. The "faith-mysticism" is the stuff out of which saints, confessors and martyrs are made. The only point on which there is room for doubt is whether, under this form of its activity, faith be a sanctifying power to any considerable extent for all, or only for persons of a particular religious temperament. Under the aspect already considered, faith is a universal moral force. No man, be his temperament what it may, can understand and believe in the lovingkindness of God as proclaimed in the gospel without being put under constraint of conscience by his faith. The man who earnestly believes himself to be a son of God must needs try to be Godlike. Even if in spiritual character he be of the unimaginative, unpoetic, matter-of-fact type, he will feel his obligation none the less ; it will appear to him a plain question of sincerity, common honesty, and practical consistency. In comparison with the mystic, he may have to plod on his way without aid of the eagle wings of a fervid religious imagination ; nevertheless observe him, and you shall see him walk on persistently without fainting. He knows little

¹ On *The Death of Christ*. Vide *EXPOSITOR* for September.

of devotee raptures; St. Paul's way of thinking concerning co-dying and co-rising is too high for him. He does not presume to criticise it, or depreciate its characteristic utterances as the extravagant language of an inflated enthusiasm; he simply leaves it on one side, and, renouncing all thought of flying, is content with the pedestrian rate of movement. But the steadiness of his advance approves him also to be a true son of faith.

The wings of the mystic are essentially one with the feet of the plain Christian man. Fellowship with Christ is only a form which the moral energy of faith takes in certain types of spiritual experience. In a low degree it is known to all, but in signal measure it is exhibited only in the lives of saints like St. Bernard and Samuel Rutherford. Translated into ethical precepts directed against fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness, to rise with Christ is a universal Christian duty;¹ but to clothe duty in that imaginative garb, and to realize it emotionally under that aspect, is, at the best, a council of perfection.

From all that precedes, it will be apparent that I regard St. Paul as teaching that sanctifying power is inherent in faith. It is not an accident that it works that way, it cannot but so work. Given faith, Christian sanctity is insured as its fruit, or natural evolution. This view, if well founded, supplies a satisfactory connection between justification and sanctification, between religion and morality. Faith is the sure nexus between the two. But some writers on Paulinism demur to such prominence being given to the moral energy of faith. One can understand how Protestant orthodoxy, in its jealousy of Romish views, should be tempted to minimise faith's ethical virtue, with the result of failing to insure a close, genetic connection between justification and sanctification; but modern commentators might have been expected to rise above such

¹ *Colossians* iii. 1-5.

onesidedness. Yet so weighty a writer as Weiss, under what influences one can only conjecture, completely disappoints us on this score. He maintains that such a view of faith's function as I have endeavoured to present is un-Pauline. The true account of the apostle's doctrine, he thinks, is that justification and the communication of new life are two distinct divine acts, independent of each other, and connected together only in so far as faith is required in receiving both. Far from producing the new life by its moral energy, faith, according to this author's reading of Paulinism, is hardly even the main condition of our receiving that life from God. In this connection, Baptism is supposed to come to the front as a second great principle of salvation, not less indispensable for regeneration, or the reception of the Holy Spirit, than faith is for justification.

Is this really Paulinism? I should be slow and sorry to believe it. This minimising of faith's function is hardly in the great apostle's line. He was more likely to exaggerate than to under-estimate the extent and intensity of its influence. We should not, indeed, expect from him any doctrine of faith which ascribed to it, conceived as a purely natural faculty of the human soul, power to renew character apart altogether from the grace of God. But he nowhere conceives of faith after this manner. He regards it as due to the action of the Divine Spirit in us that we know, have the power to appreciate, the things that are freely given to us of God.¹ And no other view of the matter is reasonable. Faith, even in its justifying function, is a fruit of the Divine Spirit's influence. It is the act of a regenerate soul. How much is implied even in the faith that justifies! A sense of sin and of the need of salvation, self-distrust, trust in God, victory over the fear engendered by an evil conscience, and courage to believe in God's goodwill even towards the guilty; instinctive insight into the magnani-

¹ *Corinthians* ii. 12.

imity of God, in virtue of which He most readily gives His grace to the lowest, with resulting boldness to conceive and utter the prayer: pardon mine iniquity, for it is *great*. Surely the Divine Spirit is in this initial faith, if He be anywhere in our religious experience, and surely the faith which at its birth is capable of such achievements will, as it grows and gains strength, prove itself equal to all the demands of the spiritual life. And because both these things are true, the whole Christian life, from beginning to end, must be conceived of as an organic unity, with faith for its inspiring soul. The rupture of that unity, by the dissection of experience into two independent experiences, justification and renewal, is a fatal mistake on the part of any one who undertakes to expound the Pauline theology. The resulting presentation is not Paulinism as it lives and breathes in the glowing pages of the four great Epistles, but the dead carcass of Paulinism as anatomized by scholastic interpreters.

And what is to be said of the theory which gives to Baptism, in reference to the new life of the Christian man, a function parallel in importance to that of faith in reference to justification? Many reasons can be given why it cannot be accepted as resting on the authority of St. Paul. It would require very clear and strong texts to overcome the antecedent unlikelihood of any such theory receiving countenance from him. Think of the man who so peremptorily said: Circumcision is of no avail, assigning to Baptism not merely symbolical, but essential significance in reference to regeneration. Then how weak his position controversially, if this was his view! How easy for Judaistic opponents to retort, What better are you than we? You set aside circumcision, and you put in its place baptism. We fail to see the great advantage of the change. You insist grandly on the antithesis between letter and spirit, or between flesh and spirit. But here is no anti-

thesis. Baptism, not less than circumcision, is simply a rite affecting the body. You charge us with beginning in the spirit and with faith, and ending in the flesh. How do you defend yourself against the same charge? It is not likely that the apostle would teach a doctrine that made it possible for foes to put him in so narrow a corner. But consider further his position as an apologist for his gospel, as not unfavourable to ethical interests. It is in this apologetic connection that he refers to baptism in *Romans* vi. And on the hypothesis as to the significance of that rite now under consideration, what we must hold him to say is in effect this: No fear of my doctrine of justification by faith compromising ethical interests. Every believer is baptized, and baptism insures a new life of holiness. This defence is open to criticism in two directions. First, on the score of logic. Opponents might bring against it the charge of *ignoratio elenchi*, saying: We questioned the moral tendency of your doctrine, of justification by *faith*, and we expected to hear from you something going to show that the faith that makes a man pass for righteous can, moreover, make him really righteous. But lo! you bring in as *deus ex machinâ* this baptism which you never mentioned before. Is this not really an admission that your doctrine of justification is morally defective? On the other hand, the hostile critic might assail the supposed Pauline apologetic on the ground of fact, by enquiring, Is then baptism an infallible specific for producing holiness? Do you find that all baptized persons live saintly lives? It is incumbent on you, who have been so severe a critic of heathenism and Judaism, to be scrupulously candid and truthful in your answer. Who does not feel that the very conception of this ideal situation is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the sacramentarian theory? After pronouncing heathenism and Judaism failures, as tested by morality, the apostle Paul, in the face of the world, in a letter

addressed to the metropolis of universal empire, declares his faith in Christianity as a religion that will stand the severest moral tests, and the ground of his confidence is—the rite of baptism!

The theory is without exegetical foundation. It is not necessary, in order to do full justice to the apostle's argument in *Romans* vi., to assign to baptism more than symbolical significance. We can, if we choose, ascribe to the rite essential significance, and bringing that view to the passage, ingeniously interpret it in harmony therewith. But it cannot be shown that baptism is for the apostle more than a familiar Christian institution, which he uses *in transitu* to state his view of the Christian life in vivid, concrete terms, which appeal to the religious imagination. He employs it in his free, poetic way as an aid to thought, just as elsewhere he employs the veil of Moses, and the allegory of Sarah and Hagar. But alas! what with him was a spirited mystic conception, has become a very prosaic dogma. It is a fatality attending all religious symbolism. An apostle cannot say, "We were baptized into Christ's death," but he must be held to mean that the rite not only symbolizes, but causes death to sin and resurrection to righteousness. Christ Himself cannot say, "This is my body," but He must be held to mean, This bread is changed into my body. Yet, in the case of the apostle, the very manner in which he expresses himself as to the prevalence of the rite might put us on our guard against ascribing to him a theory of sacramental grace. "So many of us as were baptized" (*ἃσσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν*). He leaves it doubtful whether all bearing the Christian name were baptized. Bengel appends to the word *ἃσσοι* the remark; "Nemo Christianorum jam tum non baptizatus erat." It may have been so as a matter of fact, but it cannot be inferred from the apostle's language that every Christian without exception was baptized. There may have been some who

remained unbaptized for anything he says to the contrary ; just as the statement of the evangelist, that "as many as touched were made perfectly whole,"¹ leaves it doubtful whether all who desired to touch the hem of Christ's garment succeeded in gratifying their wish. If St. Paul had been a sacramentarian, he would have taken care to exclude the possibility of doubt.²

A. B. BRUCE.

THE SOJOURN OF THE ISRAELITES IN EGYPT.

IN the present rapidly advancing knowledge of Egyptian history derived from Egyptian monuments of various kinds, papyri, inscriptions on tombs, on rocks, and so on, it is become a matter of supreme importance, as well as of lively interest, to ascertain correctly what is the true evidence of Holy Scripture as to the events, and as to the chronology of the events, which befell the Israelites in connection with Egypt.

We are perhaps unreasonable if we expect to find a record of transactions which were of vital consequence to the Israelites, and so occupy a large space in Israelite annals, in the annals of the great Egyptian empire, and more especially when those transactions were calamitous or in any way discreditable to the Egyptian power. But at the same time if the Bible history of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt is *history* and not fiction, the facts must harmonize with the condition of Egypt at the time when they are stated to have occurred. It is a matter, therefore, of considerable moment to the cause of Divine truth that we

¹ *Matthew* xiv. 36.

² A slight tinge of Bengel's dogmatism is discernible in the Revised Version, which substitutes at this point for the words of the A.V. quoted above, "All we who were baptized."