

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

the 30th verse, "the Son of man," must be comprehended in the fulness of its meaning. It is the human Jesus, Man among men, who is to be a sign to His generation. Those who can see nothing wonderful in the human will see nothing wonderful in Him. With this interpretation of these verses before us we see how fitting it was that a passage concerning signs should be followed by a passage concerning seeing. To Jesus the two were always indissolubly connected.¹

To bring a somewhat lengthy discussion to a close. We maintain that three pleas may be urged for the suggested exposition of the passage. Firstly, that it is the least forced of any. It does not arrive at the meaning of Christ's sayings by importing anything into them, but rather by developing them unto their natural and proper issue. Secondly, that it makes the meaning of various sentences in the passage much more clear and free from difficulty. Lastly, that it makes context and text mutually helpful in explaining one another.

A. T. BURBRIDGE.

HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS.

THE attempt made by Prof. Findlay, in the EXPOSITOR for June, p. 401 ff., to restore the terms of the letter addressed by the Corinthian Church to St. Paul, has proved exceedingly useful in studying the Apostle's reply. I had often wished that some one would have the courage to

¹ The remark in verse 33, immediately preceding the passage in Luke xi., may be thus briefly interpreted. No man hides a lamp away, but his object in lighting it is to give light and to give light continuously in the house. A lighted lamp not used, but hidden away, is a bit of foolishness. Let a man having once lighted his lamp, having once learned to look on things, events, persons in the right way, in the light of God and of eternity, keep that light burning in a prominent place, not using it only on the Sabbath and hiding it away for the other days of the week.

undertake the task, which is one that I felt my own inability to perform; and it would not be easy to find any person to whom one would have more gladly entrusted the difficult task. That it should be achieved to the perfect satisfaction of every one is, of course, not to be expected. Probably Prof. Findlay's reconstruction will be improved in many points through subsequent study, both by the author himself and by others. But his work will be the firm substructure on which others will build. If in the following sections of these papers any additions or changes are proposed for Prof. Findlay's and the reader's consideration, it is hoped that they will be understood in the proper light, as tokens of gratitude for the help gained from the reconstruction.

XXV. MARRIAGE AND THE DIVINE LIFE.

In writing to a community of recent converts from heathenism, St. Paul's expression was necessarily controlled and guided throughout by the consideration of what should be most easily intelligible to them. He was not composing a formal religious or philosophical treatise, where the writer might aim at an ideally complete and philosophically clear exposition. He was writing about immediate practical needs to persons whose views and power of understanding were strongly affected by their past experience as Pagans, and it was useless to write except as they could understand.

Paul would never have been the great teacher of the Gentiles, unless he had been in complete sympathy with them, unless he had been perfectly conscious of their needs and how to meet them, unless he had been perfectly able to drive home his ideas into their minds. That does not imply that he could make all the thoughts and sentiments and truths of this Epistle perfectly intelligible to all the Corinthians. On the contrary, there were in all his

Epistles many things that none of his readers would understand at the moment, some that they would probably never come to understand fully. There were probably even things that he himself did not fully understand in all their bearings as he wrote them,¹ things truer than even he knew, things which he saw dimly with the prophet's eye, and could not measure precisely with the philosopher's intelligence.

But still, Paul always had his audience clear before him. He was writing in each case a letter to a definite group of persons in a definite situation, and he wrote with a view to their powers of comprehending what he said. We cannot doubt that he often chose a mode of expression because it was specially suited to the comprehension of this particular group of persons, and that he would have selected a different expression to a group in another quarter of the world.² We should therefore never lose sight of the audience which he had in mind. We should always ask what meaning they would be likely to take from the words used; and if we can satisfy ourselves that they would naturally have taken the words of Paul in a certain way, we may be confident that Paul must have foreseen their understanding. It does not follow, of course, that the meaning which they would naturally take from his words was all that lay in them; but at least it was within Paul's consciousness as he wrote.

That men and women should devote themselves, at least occasionally for a short time, to the "divine life," separating themselves from the ordinary life of society during that period, was a common practice in the ancient world. That some should devote themselves permanently to that life in the divine service was also an accepted fact in all the more enthusiastic and deep kinds of religion. The prophets among the Hebrews, and "they that abode for ever before

¹ Compare *Hist. Comm. on Galatians*, p. 387. ² *Op. cit.* p. 342 f.

the Lord,"¹ had their analogues in the pagan cults. But religions differed widely in their conception of the sphere and character of "the divine life." In some of the pagan forms of religion the divine life was one which, from our point of view, was lower morally even than the low standard of ordinary pagan society,² and yet it was often from real religious devotion that people consecrated themselves, temporarily or permanently, to such life.

The Corinthian converts, therefore, were quite conversant with the idea that individuals might temporarily or permanently arrange their life, not according to the common rules and practices incumbent on the majority of human beings in society, but according to a special rule of service to the Divine will. They would easily and naturally take the further step, and realize that the rules of Christian service would be very different from those which they had known in their pagan days. They would then desire to understand what were the Christian rules of service.

But, on the other hand, the people of Corinth were not an Oriental race with an almost infinite capacity and yearning for the more enthusiastic and self-forgetting forms of religious sentiment. They were partly dominated by the practical, hard, matter-of-fact Roman spirit; but still more they were Greek in character, with a natural temperament which loved clear scientific definition and gracefully ordered expression in action and in language,³ which was so unfavourable to anything like extravagance or enthusiasm or disorderliness in religion as to be fatal even to vitality and reality in it. I do not mean that the Greeks were as a race

¹ 1 Sam. i. 22, 28.

² *Hist. Comm. Gal.*, pp. 38, 40, 201 f.; *Church in the Rom. Emp.*, p. 397 f.

³ This is not inconsistent with their weakness as a law-making and law-abiding race. Where they failed was not in disinclination to law, but in unwillingness to accept law imposed from without; the individual right to be a law to himself was too much emphasized in the Greek mind; even the law of the city was liable to seem an outrage on the freedom of each individual to carry out his own conception of order and law.

non-religious. No race is. Time after time in Greek history the craving of human nature for religion favoured the introduction of Oriental forms of worship ; but in every case the Greek character gradually toned down the Oriental fervour and self-forgettingness of the new cult, smoothed away its excesses, lightened its spirit, imparted order, regularity, harmony, artistic character to its natural free exuberance, and ended by depriving it of vital power, so that the same process of introduction, assimilation, and destruction was soon free to begin in respect of another fresh Oriental cult.

The pressure exercised on St. Paul by the character of the people whom he was addressing is specially strongly marked in the chapter in which he replies to their questions about marriage. He is, of course, only answering questions, not propounding a general view as to the nature of the marriage relation and its place in religion and life ; and what he has to say is to some extent limited by that fact. But still there is observable often in the chapter a pragmatical and commonplace character, a restriction of the view to mere details, a want of life and warmth, and a poverty and dryness, which can be explained in a letter of Paul's only by the necessity of adapting his explanations to the power of understanding in his audience.

In the chapter now before us it is apparent that "the divine life" is much in Paul's mind, and that in many sentences he is thinking of the relation of marriage to the divine life. Is marriage consistent with the divine life, or favourable to it? The general impression which the chapter would convey to the Corinthians, undoubtedly, was that Christians who aimed at living "the divine life" might try whether they were able to rise above the need of marriage, and that those who devoted themselves for only a brief season to "the divine life" might separate themselves for the time from their consorts, with their consent,

in order to concentrate their undivided attention on "the things of God." But these are the exceptions which Paul makes to the general rule of marriage, which the Corinthians have been advocating, and which he tacitly accepts—with these exceptions. As in various other cases, the fact which fills the mind of both writer and reader is not expressly mentioned, just because it is so strongly present to his readers. See § XXVII.

But what is "the divine life"? It is obvious that Paul vibrates between two conceptions of "the divine life."

(1) In the mystic view, in which Paul commonly lived and moved and wrote, every Christian must be living the divine life, for he becomes a Christian only when Christ lives in him. The life of faith is the life of Christ, "the divine life"; and all true Christians, whatever be their outward position in the world, are equally living that life. In this more mystical view the marriage tie between two Christians is not inconsistent with "the divine life," for it is compared by St. Paul to the relation between Christ and the Church.¹ So far from either party to the marriage tie being a hindrance to the other in "the divine life," each is a help to the other: each, living for the other, is raised out of self, as the Church lives in Christ, and Christ in the Church.

Such is the spirit in Paul's letter to the Asian Churches (*Eph.* v. 22, 23). Such, too, seems to be the thought in his mind in the enigmatic words in a later part of the present Epistle (xi. 11): "Howbeit neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord." In the previous verses the Apostle has been showing that man and woman are not two exactly similar and equal things:

¹ This view was the natural development in the Jewish mind. As Mr. Abrahams, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*, p. 86, says: "The Scriptures had used the relation of husband to wife as a type of God's relation to His world. Jewish mystics of the Middle Ages compared a man's love to God with a man's love for his wife." Probably no one that has any true sympathy with the Oriental mind could doubt that the Song of Solomon is an allegory, though the Western mind can hardly see it.

man is the primary, and woman the complementary, created to complete and perfect the primary, meaningless and purposeless without the primary. But, he adds in *v.* 11, the primary, man, also is equally imperfect without the complementary, woman, "in the Lord," *i.e.* in the divine life.¹ The divine life lies in the perfect realization of the nature of these complementary things through the mutual tie that binds them. If our view be right, then that sentence (*xi.* 11) may be paraphrased thus: "While woman is dependent on man, man equally is incomplete apart from woman, when they are regarded on the plane of the divine life."

To understand chap. *vii.* properly in its relation to Paul's thought, we must take it along with *ix.*, or, rather, we must take it in connection with the living thought of the whole Epistle. It is characteristic of Paul's torrent-like pouring forth of his mind in a letter² that frequently in the present Epistle he does not exhaust, by a formal exposition, what he has to say on one topic before he passes to the next. The reader must go on to the end before he can fully gather Paul's mind on any of the questions that were put to him. To him they are all parts of one whole; each one works into the other; and he passes from one to the other as they touch one another. Thus, in *x.* 16-22, he begins to speak of the communion of the Christian with Christ, and his exposition rises to a higher plane. He becomes more immediately and presently conscious of "the divine life." He feels that some of the topics which he has already touched on require to be raised to this loftier plane in order that their full significance may be set before the Corinthians. In *x.* 23-33 he resumes the topic of chap. *viii.*, and in *xi.* 3-16 he resumes the topic of chap. *vii.* He shows how the mystic idea of "the divine life" must be taken into account before

¹ Did St. Paul conceive the analogy as perfect? Was the Church to him the complement of Christ, essential to the realization of His nature?

² *Hist. Comm. Gal.*, p. 474.

either topic can be properly seen. Then he takes up again and completes the subject begun in x. 16-22.

(2) In chap. vii. the thought of "the divine life" is present in a more commonplace, non-mystic form. The immediate practical fact—which doubtless was involved in some of the questions addressed to him by the Corinthians—was that the life and occupations of the various members of a Christian congregation varied much, and that some had their minds more fully occupied with the actual ordinary business of life, while others turned their attention more to the work of the Church. It is clear from other passages in the Epistle that this diversity of duties caused a good deal of care and hesitation to the Corinthians, and filled some space in their letter. There was considerable competition in Church service, and some argument as to the comparative importance and honour of the various duties (xii. 4 ff.). Already at this early stage the broad distinction was becoming clear in Corinth between ordinary business and Church work—of course not, as yet, between clergy and laity (which distinction was much later in growing up), but rather between work for the common good and work for private interest. The distinction arose naturally among Greek or Roman citizens: it was the obvious and inevitable development of their previous ideas about the way of conducting societies and municipalities. The Corinthians, in putting their questions and suggestions to Paul, took the natural view that the work for the common good was among "the things of the Lord"—in short, was a branch of "the divine life"; while work for private interest was restricted to "the things of the world."

In the seventh chapter Paul moves on this lower plane of thought, as his readers required: he treats their questions on the same level on which they were conceived. Consequently the whole impresses the reader as lacking distinction and finality and philosophic clearness, and as

rather shrewdly practical and containing much good plain common sense. "He that is unmarried is careful for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married is careful for the things of the world, how he may please his wife." A saying like that is undeniable—on one side and in a certain considerable degree—but it is insufficient, it is disappointing, it touches sharply the weakness of human nature, and it touches nothing more—one might almost say, it approximates to the level of Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*.

Yet, in the struggling life of the young community of Corinth, it was unavoidable that these questions should emerge and should demand treatment in this practical, commonsense spirit. This chapter is a remarkable proof of the many-sidedness of St. Paul's nature, of his capacity for guiding his young Churches in every part of their life, of his intense practicality where the practical mind was needed. At the same time it is a remarkable proof of the danger of taking any passage of the Epistles by itself as a complete exposition instead of judging it in relation to the circumstances of the audience to which it was addressed. How misleading a conception we should gather of St. Paul's ideas on this subject, if we could not turn to other passages and compare them with this chapter!

It follows necessarily from the nature of Paul's letters that they insist most on what is lacking in his readers, that the writer tries to build up his readers, to complete their character, to lay stress on whatever is weakest in them. To the servile spirit of the Phrygians Paul emphasizes the importance of freedom; to the self-assertive and unruly spirit of the Greeks he emphasizes the need of obedience to laws and institutions and general principles of conduct;¹ to the Corinthians, who had suggested that compulsory marriage might be a useful thing in the Church,

¹ See *Hist. Comm. on Galatians*, § LIV.

and "gravely doubted whether a fixed condition of celibacy was right in itself and according to God's will for man,"¹ he insisted on the inexpediency of enforcing marriage on all, and on the advantages that celibacy might offer, amid the practical difficulties of their situation in Corinth, to a certain limited number of persons. The Corinthians had referred to "the perils and suspicions² to which the unwedded were exposed" in Corinth. Paul replied that "in view of the straitness now imminent," the principle is justifiable "to be as one is,"—an enigmatic expression in the Greek,—for the time is shortened, and the day will soon come when all temporary distinctions shall be obliterated, when "the fashion of this world passeth away." It is remarkable that here marriage is ranked along with the merely ephemeral differences, such as comfort or misery, wealth or poverty. But wherever marriage is discouraged it is regarded on that lower level; where Pauls thinks of man in his relation to God, free from the shackles of sin, he sees marriage in the loftier aspect.

But, while we find the other side of Paul's thought in passages like 1 *Corinthians* xi. 11, *Ephesians* v. 23 ff., in the Pastoral Epistles we find much the same side as here in 1 *Corinthians* vii. There, as here, Paul is concerned with the practical needs of young and growing communities of Christians amid the society of Græco-Roman towns. It happens to be forced on him there to insist more on the positive side, and to urge the importance of marriage. The danger which he foresaw was "that in later times some shall fall away from the faith . . . forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats" (1 *Tim.* iv. 1 ff.). It was, therefore, just as necessary for his purpose to emphasize the

¹ See Prof. Findlay's restoration of their letter in *EXPOSITOR*, June, p. 404. See also *EXPOSITOR*, April, p. 287 f.

² On these suspicions see, e.g., Lane in *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, chap. vi. (below p. 300).

practical value of marriage in Christian society, as it is here to point out that individuals should be free to follow the bent of their own nature, if it leads them to avoid marriage and devote themselves to the "things of God." There, men and women are, on the whole, advised to marry once. Those who are to devote themselves to work in the congregation and among the poor as widows, or as deacons, or as bishops, will be all the better fitted for it by the experience of marriage, but are to avoid a second marriage. Hence the repeated and much discussed rule that all those class officials are to be "the wife of one man," or "the husband of one wife." But no reference is made to such officials as Apostles, Prophets, etc., who were not chosen by the Church, but marked out by the Divine will. Paul has them much in mind when he pleads to the Corinthians for the right of celibacy: his view is that, if God has put celibacy in their mind and nature, they should not be urged by Church rules (such as the Corinthians proposed) to marry. But, when he wrote to Timothy or Titus about the practical work of governing a Church, it was unnecessary to speak of those personages who lay outside the range of ordinary government.

We see thus the essential identity of the teaching on this subject of St. Paul in all his Epistles, in spite of apparent differences, due to his emphasizing most the part that was most needed for his immediate purpose. In one respect only there is any development or change, and that is in the principle that those who are to engage in the practical or administrative work of the congregation, male or female, as bishops (*i.e.* presbyters), deacons, or "widows," ought to be married, but should not be a second time married. But, while this does differ from the views expressed in 1 Corinthians vii., the development is an easy one. The experience of married life is regarded as an aid in the practical working of Christian society. But there is nothing to show that

Paul ever came to regard it as an aid to the prophet, or the teacher, or the speaker with tongues in the congregation. On the contrary, there is every appearance that in those callings, which may more truly be described as "the divine life," the teaching of 1 *Corinthians* vii. continued till the end of his life.

In vii. 17 Paul asserts the identity of his teaching in all his Churches. The assertion applies, in the first place, only to the principle that every one should accept the lot in which he is placed—the principle which he could never utter too strongly. Here he devotes 17–24 to a very full and emphatic statement of it. But, in a secondary sense, it applies to his whole teaching. Rightly understood, it was the same everywhere. *Acts* xiv. 23 and xvi. 4 are to be applied to all his later Churches.

XXVI. APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA.

Before passing from this subject I may refer again to one point in regard to which further thought has changed my view. The view was stated above in § XXIII. (May, p. 383 f.), that, while very little of the supposed evidence really bore on the point, the Corinthians would hardly have ventured to suggest to Paul that all Christians should marry, if he himself had never been married. This view seems to me now to be a mistake, and this chapter appears hardly quite fully intelligible except on the supposition that Paul had never been married. If I now alter the view formerly expressed with hesitation (see p. 384), it is evident that at least I had no prejudice in favour of the view which is now stated here.

It is not that I think the interpretation of vii. 7 which is given on page 384 is incorrect or doubtful. It still seems necessary. Also the interpretation of vii. 8 as referring to "unmarried" persons in general (not restricted to "widowers," as many think) still appears to me to furnish

no argument bearing on this question. It is true that the advice given them to "abide even as I" cannot be taken as exactly parallel to "were even as I myself" in the previous verse. In vii. 7 St. Paul speaks of permanent personal nature and character; but in v. 8 the word "abide" shows this to be impossible. When the unmarried are advised to "abide even as I," the alternative is clearly implied that they might, if they chose, cease to abide so and change their condition. Hence the idea in Paul's mind is a changeable fact, not a permanent and unalterable quality of nature. The meaning must therefore be, "I say to the unmarried and to widows, it is a way of life worthy of all respect to remain without a consort (as I myself do)." But that affords no distinct criterion for deciding the question: Paul could equally well say that whether he were celibate or widower.

The decisive consideration seems to be in two arguments. The first is founded on ix. 5, where Paul claims that he has as full a right to be accompanied by a wife when he goes round his Churches as the rest of the Apostles. If he had been a widower, his words would imply that he is maintaining his right to marry a second wife, but it seems more in keeping with his character that, in that case, he should have given a different form to his retort. It is a reasonable retort to say, "I have every right to marry, and take about a wife with me, like the other Apostles," while the readers know from chap. vii. what were his reasons for remaining unmarried. But it seems a somewhat tasteless and unsuitable retort, if his wife was dead, to say, "I have every right to marry a second wife."

But, if this be too subjective or hypercritical, the next argument seems much stronger.

The second consideration lies in the relation of chap. ix. to the preceding. The strength with which Paul there asserts his rights as against the other Apostles seems

hardly explicable, unless it were called forth by something in the Corinthians' letter which he felt to be a slight. The reference to his own example in viii. 13 leads on naturally to the assertion of his right to be a model to them; but it does not explain the tone of the assertion, which is distinctly that of defence against attack or disrespect. Now there is not the slightest appearance either in viii. or in x. 23-33 that the remarks or questions of the Corinthians about meats contained anything which could be so construed. Paul answers in such a way as to show that their questions were sensible, well-conceived, and practical; while his reply is entirely in the line of explanation and defence of the teaching of the Apostles generally on the subject,¹ not of difference from them in any respect. Yet he goes off immediately afterwards into a vindication of his rights over against the other Apostles. That becomes explicable only when we bear in mind that in their questions about marriage the Corinthians, tacitly or explicitly, had contrasted St. Paul's conduct with that of the other Apostles, and had indicated their view that the other Apostles had taken the course which Christians ought to follow. ix. 1 resumes the topic of vii. (see p. 293).

Now, though to our modern ways of thinking, such a difference of opinion may seem too unimportant to rouse any feeling on either side, yet, if we judge by what is the best modern representative of the old Jewish opinion on the subject, viz., Mohammedan and especially Arab opinion, we shall find that Paul must always have been sensitive on this subject. Lane, in the passage referred to above, p. 296, mentions that his neighbours in one quarter of Cairo would not permit him to live there because he had no wife with him; and that in another quarter, where the people were less strict, they were constantly urging him to make himself respectable by marrying; and the advice was

¹ See Section XXVIII.

not jocular, but given in all seriousness. Mr. Abrahams, in his *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages*¹ speaks very strongly of Jewish ideas on this subject (though his words refer to a later time, yet they are not untrue of earlier times): the rabbi was expected and even compelled to marry, and hence his "home became at once the centre of a bright, cultured circle, and the model which other homes imitated."

So strong must this compelling force have been in St. Paul's time that some modern scholars have even maintained that he must necessarily have been married. That is not justifiable, however, for his point of view was not wholly unknown in Jewish circles. As my friend, Prof. Paterson, pointed out to me,² "Rabbi Asai took no wife: my soul, said he, cleaves to the Law, let others see to the upbuilding of the world."

Moreover, it is evident that Paul was often accused by his Jewish opponents of being a Sadducee, or no better than a Sadducee. Hence, when he was brought before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, his first words were directed to disprove that charge. "I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee."³ Now, celibacy was a Roman practice, and the unmarried Jew exposed himself to the charge of imitating Roman manners like a Sadducee.⁴ In that age the charge was annoying and even serious.

In the circumstances one can understand why Paul was touched on a sore point by the Corinthian question, whether it would not be advisable that all Christians should be married like the Apostles and the Jews generally. Incidentally it may be added that one desiderates in Prof.

¹ See pp. 91, 131.

² He quotes the words (from Weber, *Jud. Theol.*, p. 30) in *Hastings' Dict. Bib.*, art. "Marriage," iii. p. 266.

³ *Acts* xxiii. 3; compare *Philippians* iii. 6.

⁴ On the charge of Sadduceism brought against Paul there is much to say which needs a paper to itself.

Findlay's reconstruction of that part of the Corinthian letter to St. Paul some clearer expression contrasting him with the other Apostles.

If Paul chose celibacy, he must have done so while still a Jew, and there can hardly be any doubt that he chose from similar motives to Rabbi Asai. Much of chap. vii. reads like an expansion and wider application of the Rabbi's principle, especially *vv.* 29-34, where the obvious meaning is that marriage prevents the concentration of one's whole powers on "the divine life" and the things of the Lord. St. Paul, like Rabbi Asai, had resolved, even before he became a Christian, to devote himself to the work of God; and his conversion merely changed the direction of his activity and his conception of God's demands, but was not the first cause of his devotion. He believed, while he was persecuting the Christians, that he was as entirely concentrated on God's work as afterwards, when he had become a Christian.

And now, in writing to the Corinthians, he makes in chap. vii. his defence of his original choice. His defence throws a new light on his pre-Christian life, showing him "cleaving to the Law," and renouncing the ordinary life of society for his own conception of the divine life. This is a subject on which much remains to be said, but which is out of place here.

W. M. RAMSAY.

"UNTO THE GREEKS FOOLISHNESS."

A STUDY IN EARLY APOLOGETIC.

WHEN Christianity made its appearance, it was an age of scepticism and superstition often strangely mingled. Rome was the mistress of the world, and the ancient polytheism remained the official religion of the Empire. It still had its priests and temples, but it was the jest and scorn of reason-