

ST. PAUL'S RULE OF LIFE.

(2 COR. v. 14.)

“THE love of Christ constraineth us” (*ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ σωνέχει ἡμᾶς*). This beautiful and important phrase is given as a reason for the preceding statement: “Whether we are beside ourselves it is unto God; or whether we are of sober mind, it is unto you.” It is not necessary for our present purpose to go into the interpretation of that statement except to draw attention to the words “unto God” (*θεῷ*) and “unto you” (*ὑμῖν*). These datives of *interest* (*dativus commodi aut incommodi*, Winer, part iii. § 36, 4b), denoting the person in whose favour a thing is done, closely correspond with the meaning of *ὑπέρ*, a word which dominates the whole of this passage, and St. Paul’s meaning in verse 13 is, that whatever his acts or his conduct may have been, they were at any rate unselfish. He did not act or live for himself, but for the cause of God and for the sake of his disciples. He here proceeds to state the motive of this pure unselfishness. It is, he says, “because the love of Christ constraineth us. This, then, is St. Paul’s rule of life; not only the determining principle of his actions, but, when the significance of it is fully developed, the key to his conception of the Atonement, and of the work of Christ’s ministry on earth, and of his own ministry and apostleship on behalf of Christ.

The love of Christ means primarily the love which Christ has for us, the love which He manifested by His atoning death upon the cross. It is this love, or the conviction of this love, which, St. Paul says, constrains him, i.e. is a binding force or influence on his life and actions. Whatever he does, he does in consequence of this binding or constraining love. It is the guiding principle of his life. It compels

him to walk in a narrow way, as when one walks in a road fenced in on either side.

The words which follow relate to an interesting moment in the spiritual experience of St. Paul. They give the reason why, and the time since when he was constrained by the love of Christ. This point of critical importance is lost in the rendering both of the A.V. and R.V. In both versions *κρίναντας τοῦτο* is rendered, "because we thus judge." But the aorist must refer to a particular moment in St. Paul's past experience which determined the whole course of his life and thought. It was as decisive a moment for the Apostle as for St. Augustine the moment when he heard the fateful words beneath the fig tree at Milan. The words, then (*κρίναντας τοῦτο*), must mean, "when, or because we thus judged," that One died for all. To judge is to come to a decision after weighing evidence. As soon, then, as the marvellous love of Christ with all its results came home to St. Paul, as soon as he felt a reasoned conviction that the death upon the cross was for him, and for all, the sense of the love began to be a constraining influence on his life.

St. Paul's decision, then, was that "One died for all." Whether this phrase was a Christian formula of belief to which St. Paul assented, or whether the expression is his own, cannot be determined. The more important question is at what precise epoch in his life the Apostle definitely came to the decision, together with all that it involved.

It is not to be supposed that the whole of the Christian faith was presented to St. Paul at the moment of his conversion. This indeed would be inconsistent with the account which the Apostle himself gives of his spiritual growth and knowledge. "I make known to you," he writes to the Galatians, "as touching the gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me

through revelation of Jesus Christ." He then proceeds to say, "when it was the good pleasure of God . . . to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were Apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and again I returned unto Damascus" (Gal. i. 11, 12, 15-17). This independence of human instruction is involved in the meaning of *κρίνειν* (to judge), which implies not only a reasoned decision, but also independence of judgment. It is probable, then, that the momentous conclusion both as to the truth of the fact that One died for all, and also as to the truth of the spiritual consequences of that fact, came home to St. Paul in that time of solitary reflection in the Arabian desert, not improbably, it has been inferred, under the historic cliffs of Sinai.

The omission of "if" (*εἰ*) in verse 14 is undoubtedly right. But the punctuation of R.V. would be improved by placing a colon or semicolon after "One died for all." These words state the fact; the words which follow, introduced by *ἄρα* (therefore), state the inferences from the fact.

The first of these inferences is indeed a profound and remarkable one; it is one that revolutionized life. St. Paul states that, as a consequence of One, that is Christ, dying for all, all died. *Συυγενέθانون* (died with) might have been expected in place of *ἔθانون* (died), but the inferential particle *ἄρα* (therefore) implies this close connexion with the death of Christ.

In two other passages St. Paul expresses the same profound spiritual truth—in Romans vi. 4, and Colossians ii. 12. In those passages the Apostle speaks of the believer being buried with Christ through baptism into His death, and being raised with Him through faith in the working of God.

What he there attributes to faith through baptism he attributes here to the response to the love of Christ. Christ had said, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto myself." And what St. Paul says here is a proof of the attraction of the cross. It so drew St. Paul with the cords of love that he became one with Christ. He died with Him and rose with Him. When the poet speaks of—

The soul, whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee (Rossetti),

he expresses the same thought of union through love. This oneness with Christ in His death and His life is no metaphor or figure of speech with St. Paul. It is a spiritual reality, which enables him to say elsewhere even more forcibly: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

It will be seen that, as a consequence of this intensely practical, but deeply spiritual, view of the effect and meaning of the love of Christ on St. Paul's mind an immense significance is given to the use of the preposition *ὑπέρ*. The root meaning of this preposition is *over*, as when the protecting champion fights over and in defence of his friend, as *μὴ θνήσχ' ὑπὲρ τοῦδ' ἀνδρός* (Eur. *Alcest.* 690). In Homer it is frequently used of prayer for the sake of another, as, *λίσσεθ' ὑπὲρ τοκέων γουνούμενος ἄνδρα ἕκαστον* (*Il.* 15. 660). The thought of substitution is derivative and inferential, not in the word itself, which has a wider range. The Shakesperian phrase—

whose feet were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter Cross—

conveys the meaning excellently in this passage. The love of Christ for man secured the unspeakable *advantage* of death and life in Him.

The next step in the Apostle's argument is to show the result of this momentous spiritual fact on life. In the first

place, it is the acceptance by the believer of the spirit of sacrifice. St. Paul recognizes the object of Christ's death, and he accepts that as binding on himself. The object of Christ's death [was : "That they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." In one word, the object of Christ's death was to create in us the spirit of unselfishness, and of devotion to Him. The love of Christ must be the dominating influence in life. To bring this to a practical and individual issue, a Christian, and above all an Apostle, must live for others and not for himself. This is what St. Paul meant in the words already quoted immediately preceding the passage we are now considering.

Then follows an almost startling illustration of the devotion to Christ alone : "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh : even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more." That is to say, no human teacher or leader of men shall claim our devotion or our imitation, not even Christ Himself as He was known in the flesh. The Christ whom we know, with whom we are united, with whom we died, is the Christ who died for us, who rose and is glorified. To know Christ after the flesh only is to be ignorant of His eternal existence, of His Godhead, of His Incarnation, of His death on the cross for our sakes, and of His glorious resurrection and ascension.

No words could express more vividly the completeness of the revolution in human life wrought by the death of Christ. There had in fact, as the Apostle goes on to say, been a new creation. This again is no figure of speech. All things had literally become new for St. Paul. He was living a new life from which the past was banished. For what is life ? What does it consist in ? Does it not consist in our aims, our desires, our motives, our pleasures, our secret thoughts ?

And what St. Paul felt was that there was an absolute change in all these things consequent on his great decision. His passionate response to the immense love of Christ shut out for him all other aims, pleasures, motives and thoughts—all that he cared for or aimed at now was to do the will of God in Christ; to him “to live was Christ.” This was literally to be created afresh, to be a different person, living a life as distinct from the old life, in which there was no constraining love of Christ, as one man who does not know Christ is distinct from another man who loves Christ with all his heart.

St. Paul proceeds to show that, as a consequence of this new aspect of Christ, the true way of presenting the Gospel is not so much to set forth the external facts as to point to the invisible divine reality underlying the facts. Consequently he defines the gospel as—“God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses.”

In this definition St. Paul sums up the ministry of Christ on earth and in heaven. For with him there is no marked line of separation between the work of Christ upon earth and the work of the ascended Christ in heaven. Indeed he lays the greatest stress on the gospel of the Ascension. If he referred to the Gospel narratives as we have them, he would describe them as his friend and disciple St. Luke describes his gospel, as a treatise or record of all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach. He never lost sight of the continued work for us of the glorified and ascended Christ. This is, of course, the true significance of the often misquoted and misunderstood words which close the Epistle to the Ephesians: “Those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptness,” that is, in the glory of His eternity as the immortal Son of God.

Accordingly in the definition here given St. Paul wishes

to impress upon his converts this profoundly spiritual view of the ministry of Christ on earth. What he saw and loved to contemplate in the gospel was, "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

With this Pauline presentment of our Saviour's earthly ministry it is interesting to compare the brief summary of the Gospel by St. Peter. In his first address to his fellow-countrymen on the Day of Pentecost he speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth" as "a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by Him, in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know" (Acts ii. 22). And again, in the house of Cornelius, he speaks of Jesus as "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power by God, and going about and doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts x. 38).

In these passages there is, equally with the Pauline definition, an acknowledgement of the Godhead of Christ. But St. Peter appeals to his hearers as witnesses of the inspired Manhood of Christ, and of His visible acts of power. It is the gospel for those who have known Christ after the flesh, and a witnessing to the deeds done in the flesh. It is a summary of the Synoptic Gospels as they have been delivered to us. And this must always have been the basis and foundation of all Christian teaching from the very first. The inspired narratives of Christ's visible ministry upon earth will always remain the most precious and dearly prized possession of mankind. But St. Paul invites, indeed earnestly persuades, his readers to see behind and within the visible working of the Man Jesus, the actual manifestation of the invisible God. He is carrying on those converts who are already well instructed in the facts of the Gospel, to the inner meaning of the facts and to the actual doer of them. "You have been taught," he says in effect,

“ about Jesus of Nazareth going about and doing good. In reality you have been taught what was the work of God Himself, manifested in Christ. And you have been taught the meaning of the work. It was a work of reconciliation. God was making a new creation. In Christ He was actually bringing all mankind into union with God once more. That was the inner meaning of the life of Christ—of the tempter overcome, of the patient endurance of suffering, of all the divine teaching, of the exhortation to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, of the restoration of the dead to life, of the casting out of devils, of the healing of the maimed and sick, of giving sight to the blind ; the explanation too of the denunciation of sin, of the blessed promise of rest to the weary, and of forgiveness of sins ; above all, it was the explanation of the Incarnation, of the death upon the cross, and of the ascension into heaven. The explanation of all those acts of the ministry of Christ is that they were the acts of ‘ God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.’ ”

The Apostle then proceeds to give another conception of the work of God in Christ on earth. He adds the words, “ not reckoning unto them their trespasses.” We are accustomed to associate these words and the doctrine conveyed by them chiefly or only with the Epistles of St. Paul. Here the Apostle teaches us to associate them with the ministry of Christ. With St. Paul’s words to guide us, we can bring this truth into connexion with such words of Christ as that He came “ to seek and to save that which was lost,” and that He came “ to call sinners,” and said to those whom He had healed, “ Thy sins have been forgiven thee.”

It was all the more important for St. Paul to define clearly his conception of the gospel, and of the ministry of Christ, because the same gospel of reconciliation was committed

to him.¹ One of the effects of his close union with Christ was that Christ's work was his work, and one part of his response to the love of Christ was his ministry for Christ. The "therefore" of verse 20 immediately links the commission of verse 19 with the "embassage" of verse 20; but by a chain of reasoning it also links the "rule of life" (v. 14) with the necessity imposed by that rule in verse 20. And "died on behalf of all" (*ὑπὲρ πάντων ἔθανεν*, v. 14) has a near relation to "ambassadors on behalf of Christ" (*ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ πρεσβεύομεν*, v. 20).

One word may be added as to the general application of this rule of life. The whole passage is no doubt, in its primary meaning, intensely personal—a record of St. Paul's individual spiritual experience, and of his claim to be a successor of Christ Himself in the ministry of reconciliation. But the application is universal—the same rule of life is binding on all Christians, and is felt to be binding by all who, like St. Paul, have decided that "One died for all, therefore all died."²

Moreover the same deep and esoteric view of the work of

¹ The rendering of v. 19 in R.V. reads somewhat awkwardly: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself . . . and having committed unto us (placed in us, *margin*.) the word of reconciliation." The meaning would be made clearer by resolving the participles into temporal clauses: "God was in Christ when He was reconciling, etc. . . . and when He placed in us the word of reconciliation." The Vulgate, followed by A.V., has more or less solved the difficulty by substituting a finite verb (*posuit*) for the participle. Both participles are noticeable; the imperfect *καταλλάσσω* denoting the continuous, unceasing work of Christ (John v. 17), the aorist *θέμενος* the single act of divine grace in the appointment to the apostleship.

² With this extended application of the rule of life *συνέχειν* acquires a further shade of meaning. Besides the force of constraining the individual life it would also signify to bind or hold together the community. The love of Christ becomes the unifying force, the rule which binds together the whole community of Christians. Compare Eur. *Suppl.* 312, where obedience to law is said to be the binding force of states:

*τὸ γὰρ τοι συνέχειν ἀνθρώπων πόλεις
τοῦτ' ἐστ' ὅταν τις τοὺς νόμους σώζη καλῶς.*

God in Christ during His ministry on earth is more than ever necessary now. The fault of the age has been materialism. In order to be convinced of spiritual truth, it has demanded the evidence of sight and touch. It has striven to explain away miracles, and to present the life of Christ vividly and picturesquely in its external aspects. In its bitterness against superstition it has refused to believe the invisible.

But a change is taking place ; and as religion tends to materialism, the tendency of science is increasingly to recognize that ultimate truth and reality lie beyond the world of sense. Accordingly science, instead of being a hindrance to faith in the unseen, is establishing that belief by its process of discovery. When Mr. Herbert Spencer sums up the result of research by the statement that "The persistence of the Universe is the persistence of that Unknown Cause, Power or Force, which is manifested to us through all phenomena" (*First Principles*, i. 258), there is a close approach to the conclusion of St. Paul that "the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 18). And when the poet characterizes the Gospel of St. John as "the acknowledgement of God in Christ," he characterizes also the Gospel of St. Paul.¹ In this one and the same gospel of the unseen and eternal lies the solution of the ultimate problems both of science and religion :

The acknowledgement of God in Christ
Accepted by the reason solves for thee
All questions on the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise. (Browning.)

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¹ For a close parallel to 2 Cor. v. 14, see 1 John iii. 16.