

The Metaphors of St. Paul.

DR. T. R. GLOVER has entitled a chapter in his volume *Paul of Tarsus*, as the "Human Paul," and in an interesting and arresting way he gives a vivid picture of the human side of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. To build up his portrait of Paul, he closely examines the mind of his subject, and then passes to a study of the style of his writings; and his argument and illustrations clearly support the old adage that the style is the man. He writes, "Paul's style is his own, the living echo of his own mind . . . he has a great range of living allusion and metaphor, not always easy for us to grasp; his words and terms come to him from the lips of men in the street and market, and come back to them, and to us, charged with a new life and personality." (page 195.)

Undoubtedly the writings of Paul are rich in metaphor, and in fact the whole of Scripture has its own distinctive imagery, and through the use of this imagery much instruction is conveyed. Therefore, in order to understand Paul, it is not enough to study his writings, but it is necessary also to know something of his times; for, as the late Canon Howson says, "In studying the Bible, the dictionary of things is almost as important as the dictionary of words; and Paul's writings are no exception to this rule, but one of its best exemplifications."

No writer can express himself without keeping in close touch with the fashions, tastes, habits and ways of his own time. If he does not, he becomes unintelligible to the people to whom he is writing. Therefore, in any study of the metaphors of Paul we must endeavour to reset his words in the associations of his own day. "When a man has once seen a really Oriental city, and made himself familiar with the sights and smells of a bazaar, walked on the flat roofs or stood among the camels, he has acquired a power of appreciating the Old Testament such as no dead lexicon can ever give him. And how great a help for the New Testament is gained when, in some good museum, a man has taken in his hand a silver Denarius and reflected that this might have been the very piece of money that was shown to our Saviour." (Howson.)

It is interesting to notice that Paul's favourite metaphors and illustrations are in some ways unlike those used by his Master. The Lord Jesus Christ was a man of the open air. For the greater part of His life He lived in small towns and villages, and naturally drew on the sights and scenes of those places to illuminate His teaching. His many parables reveal

clearly enough that He made close contact with nature and the simple things of earthly life. But Paul was a dweller in towns, a university man, one who felt very deeply the hustle and bustle of city life. He was also a traveller to far-off places, familiar with docks, and ships and buildings, and the colourful life of busy centres of commerce; consequently his writings are filled with those things. Paul and Jesus lived in the same century, and were men of the same spiritual outlook and purpose; but because of their differing environments they reveal contrasts in their style of expression, for men can only draw on those things with which they are familiar.

If we limit our study of Paul's metaphors to the Pastoral Epistles we find that he uses nine varieties. Some of them are found in other Pauline Epistles, for the stock of metaphors any writer can use is definitely limited. But it does not follow that Paul's mind was barren of ideas because he finds it necessary to repeat himself.

1. Imperial warfare is frequently used to illustrate the struggle and conflict of the life of a Christian.

"thou mayest war a good warfare" (1 Tim. i. 18).

"give none occasion to the adversary" (1 Tim. v. 14). (The word for occasion is peculiar to Paul in the New Testament. It is frequent in Classical Greek, i.e. Thuc. i. 90, "a base of operations" in war.)

"a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. ii. 3).

"take captive silly women" (2 Tim. iii. 6).

2. Classical architecture is used to describe the building up of the Christian life.

"a good standing" (1 Tim. iii. 13).

"the house of God which is . . . the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15).

"a good foundation" (1 Tim. vi. 19.)

"the firm foundation standeth" (2 Tim. ii. 19.)

3. Ancient agriculture is drawn upon also. In fact, it is used in the Pastoral Epistles as numerous as any other class, thus revealing that, although Paul was a man of cities and towns, the impression that country life and industry had made on his mind was not small.

"we labour and strive" (1 Tim. iv. 10).

"they who labour in the word" (1 Tim. v. 17).

"the labourer is worthy of his hire" (1 Tim. v. 18).

"a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. vi. 10).

"reprove them sharply" (literally "cutting away as with a sharp pruning knife") (Tit. i. 13).

“that they be not unfruitful” (Tit. iii. 14).

“the husbandman that laboureth” (2 Tim. ii. 6).

4. The fourth section of metaphors is drawn from Greek games.

“exercise thyself unto godliness” (1 Tim. iv. 7).

“play thou the man in the good contest of faith” (1 Tim. vi. 12).

“if a man contend in the games” (2 Tim. ii. 5).

“I have finished my course” (2 Tim. iv. 7).

5. There is only one metaphor concerning Roman law, although in Paul's other letters the word for “heirs” and its kindred phrases occur eighteen times.

“that we might be made heirs” (Titus iii. 7).

Now we come to the last four classes, and the words and phrases used are almost entirely peculiar to the Pastoral Epistles.

6. The first is Medical Science.

“consent not to sound words” (1 Tim. vi. 3).

“to exhort in the sound doctrine” (Tit. i. 9).

“that they may be sound in the faith” (Tit. i. 13).

“things which befit the sound doctrine” (Tit. ii. 1).

“not endure the sound doctrine” (2 Tim. iv. 3).

“eat as doth a gangrene” (2 Tim. ii. 17).

7. Next, Seafaring Life.

“made shipwreck concerning the faith” (1 Tim. i. 19).

“such as drown men in perdition” (1 Tim. vi. 9).

8. Thirdly, Mercantile Life.

“godliness is a way of gain” (1 Tim. vi. 5).

“my deposit” (2 Tim. i. 12).

“the good deposit” (2 Tim. i. 14).

9. Lastly, the Fowler's Craft.

“the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. iii. 7).

“fall into temptation and a snare” (1 Tim. vi. 9).

“out of the snare of the devil” (2 Tim. ii. 26).

The above nine classes of metaphor are drawn from the Pastoral Epistles only, but the first five recur very frequently in the other Epistles of Paul. Compare, for example, the metaphors from Roman Law:

“adoption” (Rom. viii. 15, 23; Gal. iv. 5; Eph. i. 5).

“testation and inheritance” (Gal. iii. 15, iv. 1, etc.).

We may say that these metaphors are of a permanent nature. Paul did not choose as illustrations for his teaching, the

transient and the passing. Modern life has not outgrown those trades, professions, sports, and industries, although perhaps "the fowler's craft" is not so well known in the twentieth century as it was in the first. But all the others (warfare, architecture, agriculture, games, medical science, law, seafaring and mercantile life) are still to be found in our day. If Paul had only drawn, or frequently drawn, on the passing things of the first century, much of his writing would be unintelligible to us, and we would need to undertake a good deal of research to arrive at the meaning of the message he was endeavouring to express. But because he drew on the basic professions, trades, etc., of civilisation, his meaning is almost as clear to us as it was to his readers nearly two thousand years ago. Thus it seems that the Holy Spirit led him in this path so that later ages might know the mind of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

We must not forget that there is evidential value in a study of the metaphors of Paul. Some scholars are not ready to assign the Pastoral Epistles as entirely from the hand of Paul. But the fact remains that there is a unity of style in the use of metaphor, and the unity of style tends to prove the unity of authorship. Authors may change their style over a long period of time, but certain peculiarities of speech and writing will always remain, and perhaps we can say that Paul retained these peculiarities in his use of similar metaphors in different letters.

It is clear also that the active, energetic side of the Christian life made its paramount appeal to Paul. He does not dwell very much on the mystical contemplative aspect of Christian experience when using these metaphors; but almost without exception he uses them to illustrate the building up of the soul into the likeness of Christ, or the spreading, by vigorous effort, of the Gospel throughout the world. Paul was a man of action. He was "engaged on an enterprise very difficult," and in consequence the scenes and manners of men around him which illustrated the "work of faith and labour of love" were drawn upon very freely.

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