

ART. III.—OUR LORD'S TEACHING CONCERNING HIMSELF—III.

II. OUR LORD'S TEACHING CONCERNING HIS MISSION.

OUR Lord laid great emphasis upon His mission. Again and again He describes Himself as sent forth from God. "I came forth," He says, "and am come from God; for neither have I come of Myself, but He sent Me." "The living Father sent Me." And generally, where it is expressly affirmed that the Father sent the Son, the word used—*ἀποστέλλειν*—conveys the idea that the Son is the delegate, the envoy and representative of the Father. Our Lord, as Westcott notes, "presents His own mission as the one abiding mission of the Father." Moreover, Christ's mission is grounded in His Person. He is not the Son of God because He is sent, but He is sent because He is the Son of God; and in order to fulfil His mission He became Son of man. As Son of God He is qualified to be the representative of the Father, and as Son of man He makes the Father accessible to us.

In our Lord's mission three distinct, but correlated, functions may be distinguished—Revelation, Redemption, and Judgment.

(1) *Revelation.*

Our Lord declares that He came into the world to bear witness to the truth. He is Himself the Truth. His coming was the coming of the Truth. By the Truth is meant the expression of God's thought and will and character. Christ explained God to us. He shows us the Father. "No one," saith St. John, "hath ever yet seen God." God had indeed manifested Himself in His works; He had spoken by the prophets; in visions and theophanies and angelic splendours they had caught glimpses of His glory; but God Himself no one had ever yet seen. Then at last appeared the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, in a transcendent fellowship of life and love with the Eternal; He declared, interpreted God to men. "He that hath seen Me," saith Jesus, "hath seen the Father."

Compare with the testimony in St. John our Lord's declaration in the Synoptics: "No one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth anyone know the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."

Observe it is not knowledge about the Father or the Son that is meant, but knowledge of each as a personal, intimate,

essential knowledge of the very Being Himself. Of this knowledge there are four things to be noted :

First, it is not mere human knowledge, of however extraordinary character ; it is not knowledge which man as man could possess. Secondly, it is not mutual knowledge merely, but commensurate knowledge. Our Lord asserts His knowledge of the Father to be equal to the Father's knowledge of Him. Thirdly, our Lord's knowledge of the Father is not the outcome of a remembrance He has of a former fellowship with Him ; it flows out of a present fellowship, out of His unbroken community with the Father. Jesus insists upon His personal connection with the Father. His message was drawn directly and continually from the Father as the message of no prophet could be. "The only-begotten Son *which is in the bosom of the Father,*" He declared Him. Then, fourthly, the revelation of God in and through Christ is a living and personal revelation. The Divine life and being are expressed in the terms and under the conditions of human life in the obedience, purity, goodness, love, and self-sacrifice of Jesus. The Fatherhood of God is manifested in the well-beloved Son. "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father."

I must pass by with the merest mention one of the most debated questions of the day—the relations of our Lord to the Old Testament. He honoured it, He appealed to it ; and His appeal is the more remarkable standing as it does side by side with His own unparalleled self-assertion. He claimed to be the goal and subject of the Old Testament. He affirmed its inviolability. He corrected misinterpretations and rebuked additions to it. He discriminated what was temporary in it, but He accepted it as stamped with irrefragable Divine authority, and assured men of the certainty of its fulfilment.

Our Lord knew the Old Testament as no one else ever did or could know it. Not only was He a profound student of the Old Testament, not only did He declare Himself to be its supreme subject, but He is Himself the Mediator through whom its revelations were given. Surely, then, He must have known not only its substance and contents, but the real form and manner in which its revelations were given. He must have known, for example, whether the facts of the sacred history were as the Jews of His day believed, and as the whole Christian Church has since believed, or whether they were what a prevalent school of Old Testament criticism affirms, when it reverses the whole history of Israel, as well as the literary history of the Scriptures.

Is it conceivable that our Lord could be in ignorance of the real character and origin of the writings which He received and stamped with His authority as God's own Word to men ?

If our Lord were so ignorant in regard to the former revelations of God, what guarantee have we that His claims to be Himself the supreme revelation of the Father are not vitiated by the same ignorance? The extreme critics find here no difficulty, because their view of our Lord's Person is on the same low level as their view of the Old Testament. But those who are attempting to hold fast to their faith in Christ as Incarnate God, while they accept the destructive theories of recent criticism, must face the tremendous issues raised, for these theories impugn either the character of our Lord, or His competency and capacity as the revealer of God.

(2) *Redemption.*

The mission of Jesus was distinctively a mission of salvation. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost." "God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him." In the Synoptics this salvation is described as the kingdom of God; in St. John as the gift of eternal life. In St. John the two are conjoined in our Lord's discourse to Nicodemus, where the birth from above is declared to be the condition of entrance into Christ's kingdom, as in Mark x. 15 it is declared that one must enter the kingdom as a little child. In the expression "kingdom of God" (of heaven) our Lord takes the Jewish expectation of Messiah in its carnal, materialized form, and uplifts it into the inward and spiritual. "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . the kingdom of God is within you." To enter into the kingdom and to have eternal life are synonymous in John (iii. 3, 5, 15, 16), and both from different standpoints set forth the Messianic salvation.

With this salvation the death of Christ is specifically connected. It is true that the object of His death is not different from the work of His life. All is of a piece. Whatever Christ taught, or wrought, or endured was for us men and for our salvation. His whole work of revelation was a work of redemption. But His revelation of the Father would have been far from complete without His death, which was the crowning manifestation of God's character and will, the supreme demonstration of His love. But it is much more. Christ's death was not a gratuitous exhibition of Divine love; there was a Divine necessity which required it. Without it man's salvation was impossible.

The thoughtful reader cannot fail to notice how large a place in the Gospels is occupied by the death of Christ. The shadow of the cross lies athwart His whole ministry. From its very outset His death is ever before Him as its predestined

goal. In the case of the prophets and saints of the Scriptures their death is but an incident, merely mentioned, rarely described, and that in briefest form. But in the case of our Lord His death is the great event to which His whole life leads. It does not intervene as an accident or an interruption; on the contrary, it is the consummation of His mission, towards which He deliberately and voluntarily advances. At first He speaks of it with a measure of reserve and in parables. The temple of His body is to be destroyed, and He will raise it up again. He is to be lifted up like the serpent in the wilderness. He is to give His flesh for the life of the world. The disciples will fast when the bridegroom is taken away from them. The good Shepherd will lay down His life for the sheep. By His death He will draw all men unto Him. He will be as the seed cast into the ground, which dies to bear much fruit. By His death He will give the crowning proof of His love for His friends.

Upon three notable occasions He foretold in plainest terms to His disciples, as they were able to bear it, His death and resurrection: after St. Peter's confession at Cæsarea Philippi, after the transfiguration, and on His last solemn progress towards Jerusalem. St. Mark prefaces His account of the third announcement with a remarkable description. The Lord walks before; the disciples follow; they are filled with fear. There is that in the Lord's demeanour, His solemnity and air of determination, that impresses them with a strange awe. His face was steadfastly set to meet the great ordeal of sacrifice and suffering by which alone His mission of salvation could be consummated.

Three great truths in regard to His death are emphasized by our Lord. First, His death was voluntary. "I lay down My life," He says. "No one taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Secondly, His death was a necessity. "The Son of Man must suffer." His death was an act of obedience to the Divine will, the fulfilment of the Divine plan. "Behoved it not," He demanded of the doubting disciples on the way to Emmaus—"behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things?" And He repeated it on the evening of the same day: "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer and rise again." And, thirdly, His death was a substitution, an expiation. He gave His life a ransom for many—a *λύτρον*, price of redemption—the one instead of the many. He laid down His life for the sheep. He applied to Himself Isaiah's portraiture of the suffering servant of Jehovah, who took our infirmities and bore our diseases, upon whom the Lord laid the iniquity of us all. And when Jesus instituted sacred signs as pledges of His love, it was

His death that they proclaimed and commemorated. "This is My body which is given for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you." "This is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

The death of Jesus, as He viewed it, was not merely a revelation of the Divine love and a disclosure of the Divine holiness and antipathy to sin; it was a representative and vicarious death—a death of expiation by which sin is put away and the sinner redeemed and saved.

(3) *Judgment.*

The function of judgment seems, perhaps, incompatible with Christ's mission of salvation. He Himself said that He "came not to judge the world, but to save the world." And yet He says, "For judgment came I into this world." He came, indeed, not to execute judgment, and yet judgment is the natural and inevitable result of His coming.

1. There is a *continuous* judgment effected in and by Christ's work of revelation and redemption. The light which reveals must judge the thoughts and characters of men. The truth tests and tries those to whom it is presented. The message of salvation divides men as they receive or reject it. The manifestation of Christ to the world separates it into two great classes. "He that believeth on Him is not judged; but He that believeth not is judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only-begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."

2. The process of judgment which is continually going on will *culminate in a crisis of judgment* at the close of this world-period—"the last day"—when "all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment."

The last judgment is frequently represented by our Lord in parabolic form. The tares and the wheat, after they have long grown together, are finally separated; when the net is drawn up, the bad fish are culled out from the good; in the solemn gathering of the nations the sheep and the goats represent the two great divisions in which they are placed. Again and again the Son of man is described as coming in His glory for the great ordeal of the final separation. And in one place He is described as King, for judgment has always in the East been regarded as a royal prerogative.

In all these representations the final state of men is determined by their relations to Christ. Not only is He the standard by which men's characters are judged, but He Himself will determine the destiny of each. The Father "hath committed all judgment unto the Son," to the end that "all may honour the Son even as they honour the Father."

It is significant that the three prerogatives which our Lord claims correspond to His threefold office as the Christ. Revelation is the work for which the prophet is set apart. Salvation is effected by sacrifice, to make which is the function of the priest. To judge is the royal prerogative. The validity and completeness of the Messianic mission of Jesus is thus attested. Jesus is the Christ—the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King.

Moreover, these three prerogatives—to reveal, to redeem, to judge—belong to our Lord, both as Son of man and as Son of God.

On the one hand, they belong to him as Son of man. There could be no revelation of the Father accessible to us except through One who possessed our nature and lived our life, and in that nature and life showed us the Father.

No redemption could be achieved for us except by One who stood in our stead as our representative. To seek and to save the lost the great Seeker must come in the form of a servant and be made in the likeness of men; and thus only can He serve and suffer for our redemption.

And we are expressly told that it is "because He is the Son of man that the Father hath given Him authority to execute judgment." The Judge, as Westcott says, must share the nature of those who are brought before Him. He knows what is in man—all his infirmities and temptations. He has a fellow-feeling with us, and will be a merciful as well as a righteous Judge.

On the other hand, it is only because He is Son of God that He is able to exercise these high prerogatives, to discharge the great functions of His mission. Only He who is in the bosom of the Father, who knows God even as He knows Himself, can give us a true and adequate revelation of the eternal. Only because He is the Son of God could it be just to substitute Him the innocent for the guilty, or could value be given to the ransom which He paid. Only the Son of God could truly judge His fellows, could read the hearts of men, trace out unerringly their motives, and weigh the merit or the demerit of every act and thought. Such searching and unerring judgment is beyond the powers of man. Only He who made us can thus know and weigh us and determine justly our destiny.

What, therefore, our Lord teaches concerning His *mission* confirms what He teaches concerning His *Person*. Together they make one magnificent and irresistible presentation of His claims. In them He repeats to us His great question, "Whom say ye that I am?" What answer can we give? What answer can be given by anyone who has humbly and sincerely sought to receive and understand His words? Is any other answer possible than that attested by the Christian consciousness through nineteen centuries? Other answers have been attempted. The first denial of His deity came from Arius, who apparently went so close to the Christian creeds that only an iota separated them. He exalted Jesus to the highest pinnacle of creaturehood, far above angels and archangels, one like unto God, but not God. And in doing this he stripped the Son of His true humanity, as well as of His deity. But Arianism could not live. It proved but a revived heathenism with its demigod. It passed away for ever.

Next came the answer of Socinus: Jesus is man, but man supernaturally born and endowed—the Virgin's Son. But the miraculous birth must go. Modern Unitarianism makes Jesus man, no longer physically supernatural—a perfect, sinless man. "I know not," said Channing, "what can be added to the wonder, reverence, and love that belong to Jesus." But a sinless man is a miracle. How shall this miracle be got rid of? Few have dared even to hint that Jesus was an impostor. Others say that He was a dreamer. Both answers are so crude, so self-contradictory, so preposterous, that unbelief stands confounded before the problem of Christ's character and claims. These claims are so tremendous that, if they are not true, He who made them falls far below the level of humanity. Dean Farrar truly says: "It should be definitely understood that if Christ were not sinless and Divine, He would be lower, not higher, than all who have lived holily on earth; for then His claims would be false, and His personality stained with the poor vice of self-satisfaction." Strauss admitted that if Christ really advanced the claims which are set forth in the Gospels he "should lose faith in his excellence as a man." These are remarkable words of Lessing: "If Christ is not truly God, then Mohammedanism was an undoubted improvement upon the Christian religion. Mohammed, on such a supposition, would indisputably have been far more veracious, more circumspect, and more zealous for the honour of God."

There is no escape from the great dilemma. Either we must cease to revere Christ as a good man or we must bow before Him in adoration and hail Him Lord of All. The

appeal has been—"Back to Christ." By this test we are prepared to abide.

When St. Peter, in answer to our Lord's challenge, made his great confession, his faith rested upon convictions to which he was "impelled by the facts of Christ's earthly life and the spiritual experiences it awakened" in him. As Dr. Forrest has ably demonstrated, there is no contradiction between the historical and the spiritual; the latter to be real must rest upon the former. The experience of the Christian Church would be worthless were it not founded upon the great redemptive facts recorded in the Gospels. On the other hand, it is only in the light of a genuine spiritual experience that the facts themselves can be truly apprehended. Our right position is at the feet of Christ. "Come to Me," He pleads; "learn of Me."

To the questioning Nathanael, Philip's answer—"Come and see"—presents at once the simplest and the profoundest apologetics. In a time of stress and conflict, when our Lord suggested "the possibility, yet the incredibility, of His desertion by the Twelve," it is St. Peter who replies, "To whom shall we go?" Admitting that there are difficulties, problems that perplex and confound us, to whom shall we carry them? Who will do more for us than Christ? Who will give us clearer guidance? As has been well said, "Simon Peter could stand with His Master in a minority. He accepts Christ, hard sayings and all. He looks at every hard saying in the light of Christ, not at Christ in the light of the hard saying."

Christ cannot fail us. Let us not fear to trust Him. "I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." And that light, we know, "shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

J. P. SHERATON.

ART. IV.—"OUR UNHAPPY DIVISIONS"—VI.

THERE are not many true soldiers and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, I believe, who are not becoming painfully conscious that the cause of their Master is being sorely hindered and weakened by the divisions and contentions among those who are called by His Name. We may not turn aside from the emphatic words of Holy Scripture, which bid us to be "of one accord, of one mind" (Phil. ii. 2), and to