

done, that it was a glory to be so superseded and eclipsed, and so enabled him to make his last his most beautiful words: "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."¹

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*SOME LEADING IDEAS IN THE THEOLOGY OF
ST. PAUL.*

"FAITH in Christ" would be allowed by every one to be the central point in the teaching of St. Paul. But there is reason to fear that these words are often very superficially understood.

The name "Christ" is so familiar to us that we are apt to think of it almost as a proper name, and to forget its weighty significance and the long chain of associations with which it was bound up. When St. Paul used the word, he used it as something much more than a proper name. For him it had the most profound and intense meaning. The moment when he became convinced that the title could be rightly applied to Him whom by the act of applying it he took for his Lord and Master was the turning-point of his life.

Let us try to place ourselves in thought at the time when St. Paul left the gates of Jerusalem with a commission from the high priest to apprehend and bring

¹ John iii. 28-30.

back in chains all the members that he could find of that obscure and persecuted sect which was afterwards to bear the name of Christians. He was a young man, but with none of the usual carelessness and indifference of youth to serious things. On the contrary, he was fired with the most intense religious zeal. He prized to the utmost the privilege that he possessed as one of the Chosen People. He had a sincere reverence for the law in which he had been brought up. He had spent upon it the most diligent study. He had sought the best master that could be obtained. He had sat at the feet of Gamaliel, and had learnt all that that wisest of the rabbis had to teach. Nor did he merely accept the law as his own personal rule of life. He was an ardent patriot, and shared deeply in the hopes of his nation. Like the rest of his countrymen, he felt the galling yoke of Rome, and longed for the time when Israel should rise like one man and hurl back the hated foreigner to the sea. Some vague expectation he may have had that the Great Deliverer foretold by the prophets would come in his day, and restore the people to more than their old height of greatness and power. In his youthful enthusiasm he looked forward to the time when Jerusalem should be again the city of the Great King, and all nations should flow unto it.

It was precisely this which horrified him so much in the sect that he was at that moment engaged in persecuting. They too professed to believe in a Messiah. Nay, they asserted that the Messiah had already appeared. But instead of leading his people to victory, instead of expelling the Roman oppressor and restoring the Davidic kingdom, He had perished igno-

miniously by the death that was usually reserved for malefactors, traitors, and slaves. The mere idea that such an one could possibly be the promised Messiah gave a shock to every principle and every prejudice that birth and education had planted in the young zealot's heart.

Still, it would have been a mistake to think that he was satisfied with his present position. There were some things that caused him serious difficulty. The law held up before him an ideal of righteousness: "The man that doeth these things shall live by them." The strict fulfilment of the commandments of the law was the only way to escape the just judgment of God. But was it possible to fulfil the Divine commands? Could any one really keep the law—that law of which it was said that whosoever should keep the whole of it and yet offend in one point, he should be guilty of all? St. Paul felt that he could not do this. He had tried, and tried in vain. He was conscious that, do the very best he could, he yet should not be able to put in any plea of innocence before God. Much, then, as he was attached to the law, he felt that it was, after all, a hopeless kind of service. It had not brought, and could not bring, him any real peace of mind.

There was also something disquieting in the opinions of the persecuted Christians. They, too, seemed to give men courage and constancy. No fault could be found with the holders of those humiliating tenets except the humiliating tenets themselves. And yet even in these there was one point at least that was strange and doubtful. Every one knew that the Founder of the sect had died. He had died a shameful death. But his disciples asserted a startling fact—that, after

He had been laid in the grave, He had risen from it. A stone had been laid at the mouth of the grave, but it had been found rolled away, and He, whom the Jews had left for dead, had afterwards appeared, not once or twice, but many times, to his disciples ; and He had promised that as they had seen Him go, so also should they see Him return.

What if all this should be true? If it were true, then such a strange supernatural intervention must be enough to shew that He for whom it was wrought was indeed something more than man. In spite of the manner of his death, his disciples could not be altogether wrong when they claimed that He was the Messiah. Either the fact of the alleged resurrection was not true, or else the whole of his own ideas must undergo a change.

It was while revolving some such thoughts as these that the future Apostle drew near to Damascus. But suddenly his course was arrested. A light flashed across his path ; and as he fell terror-stricken from his horse a voice sounded in his ear, " I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."

It *was* true then. Jesus of Nazareth *was* risen. He *was*, after all, really the Messiah in whom all the hopes of Israel were to centre.

Naturally it was not to be expected that St. Paul should be able to reconcile to himself this tremendous discovery all at once. He must needs retire, as he himself tells us that he did, into the deserts of Arabia, and there wrestle with the throng of thick-coming thoughts which he was afterwards to weave into a coherent theological system.

The main points in that system were four. First,

Jesus was the Messiah. Secondly, the proof of his Messiahship was in the Resurrection. Thirdly, his death upon the cross could not be merely a death of shame, it must have some further and deeper significance as well. Fourthly, faith in Jesus as the Messiah must be the starting-point for the believer.

In the light of these fundamental ideas the Apostle—for now he may be called by that name—found by degrees most of his old difficulties resolved. His misgivings in regard to the law were verified. He became convinced that it was really insufficient to give salvation. It could condemn sin, and, by condemning it, increase its sinfulness; but that was all. It entirely failed to help men to attain that righteousness which its own standard required.

This, then, was the real object and significance of the Messiah's coming. Righteousness had been always recognized as the necessary condition of the Messianic reign. In this the Jewish as well as the Christian literature adhered strictly to the outline drawn in the prophetic books.

The Messiah, therefore, had come to do just what the law had failed in doing—to superinduce upon men a state of righteousness. If man had succeeded in attaining to righteousness by his own unaided efforts and in obedience simply to the law, then this righteousness would have been spontaneous. It would have been the result of his own labour. It would have been human in every sense.

But the righteousness which the Messiah brought was not derived from human efforts. Like the whole of the Messianic scheme, it proceeded directly from God. And therefore the Apostle speaks of it always

as a righteousness "of God"—a righteousness that is, of which God is *the Author*. The gospel is a revelation of this righteousness to men.

But how is the state of righteousness brought about in them? What was it that the gospel, or message proclaiming the Messianic kingdom, offered which the law could not offer?

There was a twofold answer to this question. The advent of the Messiah had altered both the relation of God to man and the relation of man to God.

It had altered, first, the relation of God to man. Here the Apostle found the profound significance of that act which in his pre-Christian stage had been the great stumbling-block in his way—the death of the Messiah. It had seemed to him impossible that the Messiah should die such a death; but now he came to see that this very death was, not only in accordance with prophecy, but was really the cardinal point in the Messianic scheme of salvation.

Under the old Jewish law the only way in which a condition of righteousness could be obtained, except by the strict literal fulfilment of the legal precepts, was by the offering of sacrifice. Particular offences might be expiated—or at least the forgiveness of God might be sought for them—by particular offerings. As the Jewish history had gone on the doctrine of sacrifice had been deepened. The prophets had taught that the mere act of sacrifice was unavailing without sincere repentance and contrition on the part of the worshipper. Still the offering of sacrifice continued to be enjoined, and the two ideas of sacrifice and of expiation were bound up together.

Was it not possible, then, to regard the death of the

Messiah as one great act of sacrifice, and one great expiation? Was there not something permanent—was there not some dimly foreshadowed meaning in this rite of sacrifice, which was not confined to the Chosen People, but diffused, as it were, by some divine instinct over the whole of the ancient world? Yes, we may suppose the Apostle arguing, there *was* something permanent in it; it *had* a most profound meaning. The death of Christ, the Messiah, was an expiation of sins. He *was* the Paschal Lamb whose sacrifice made the destroying angel turn away his sword. His death *did* act as a propitiation (*ἱλαστήριον*), in view of which God became more ready to pardon sin, and admit to the condition of righteousness which the Messianic reign implied.

Let me for a moment ask for a suspense of the judgment and criticism which this statement may seem to provoke, and go on further with our exposition.

The death of Christ operated a change objectively on the relations of God to man. But how was that change to become subjective? How was it to be answered by a change in the relation of man to God? The Messiah had died, but how did this affect the members of the Messiah's kingdom? The means by which it was brought home to them was that act of the mind by which the believer at first claimed and obtained his membership in that kingdom—the act of faith. Faith is the bond of allegiance which unites the Messiah to his people. It is something like the old feudal loyalty transferred into the spiritual sphere. It is the readiness to spend and be spent—an intense, enthusiastic, self-annihilating devotion. It began, of course, in the first disciples, with the intellectual con-

viction of the true Messiahship of Jesus. But this first intellectual step gave way to an inrush of moral emotion. Every feeling that could possibly be felt by the members of a perfect ideal kingdom for the perfect ideal King did but grow out of this. Love, veneration, implicit trust and firm fidelity, passive obedience and active energetic service, all these had their root in faith.

Faith is thus the key which unlocks the door of the Messianic kingdom, and which therefore admits the believer at once into a sphere of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. The true member of the Messianic kingdom is righteous by the very fact of his membership. He does not need to work out painfully a righteousness of his own, but a righteousness is made for him. It is the gift of God through Christ. As Christ by his death removed the weight of the Divine anger and determined the character of his own kingdom as one upon which God could look propitiously, without any shadow of displeasure, but with the full and free outpouring of his grace and favour, so now the believer by obtaining a share in that kingdom obtains a share in its blessings—no longer stands under sentence of condemnation, but enters upon that state of tranquillity and peace which the favour of God brings with it in its train.

The vain and fruitless efforts which were made under the law thus received their accomplishment, but in another way. By the way of legal obedience it was found impossible to attain to righteousness. But by the way of faith—by the loyal adhesion to Jesus as the Messiah—the believer at once entered into a state of things in which he was accounted righteous before

God. His faith was *imputed to him for righteousness*. The standard by which he was judged was no longer the extent of his legal obedience, which must be at the best imperfect, but rather the degree and strength of his devotion to Christ, as in itself the surest guarantee for righteous action of which human nature is capable.

For the righteousness which comes by faith is no merely legal fiction. Faith, or the devotion of the soul to Christ, is not in itself righteousness, but it is the strongest motive and impulse to righteousness that could possibly be found. It is at least a proof, even in its earliest stages, that he who has it is in the right way, that he is not deceived by any blind self-confidence, but that he has allied to himself the strongest moral force that has ever been devised.

And what makes this force still more efficacious, is that it is capable of almost unlimited development. Here is opened out to us another side of the Apostle's teaching. Faith is of the nature of an attachment. Love enters into it very largely, but love includes the desire to become like that which is loved. When mingled, as it must be in the Christian, with reverent admiration, it involves a tender submissive approach, such as that of the woman who said within herself, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be whole." Such is the faith—the loving faith—of the Christian. It draws near, if it may touch the hem of Christ's garment. As time goes on it grows more and more in closeness and intimacy; it becomes such that St. Paul describes it by a stronger name still: he calls it a union or fellowship with Christ.

Strictly speaking, the use of the words, "union," "oneness," is a metaphor. The limits of personality are

rigidly defined. They are the most fundamental part of consciousness, and no impressions from without, however close and penetrating, can really infringe upon them. Still there is but little of hyperbole in the Apostle's language. It would hardly seem as if any other words could adequately express his meaning, which is that of the closest possible influence that spirit can exercise upon spirit. The Christian and his Lord are one. Even the less advanced Christian is potentially what the advanced and experienced Christian is more or less actually.

This oneness, then, of the Christian with Christ, becomes the base of a new series of ideas. The Christian "lives and moves and has his being" in Christ. The Spirit of Christ dwells in the Christian, animates his actions, encourages his hopes, ratifies his consciousness of reconciliation with God, joins in his prayers.

The influence of the Spirit of Christ upon the soul becomes a new principle side by side with the human personality. It is the guarantee of all true life—ethical, spiritual, and even physical. For through his relation to Christ the Christian is carried out of the sphere of the perishable, and is made one with that which is immortal and eternal. The seeds of evil and corruption are implanted in the body. It is the impulses of the body which give rise to sin. When, therefore, the Christian has got free from these, as he has through union with Christ, he is separated from that by virtue of which he was a prey to death; he is brought into contact with that which is both itself ever-living and the true source of life. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up

Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Jesus from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." The three ideas of moral life—the essence of which is righteousness; of spiritual life—the essence of which is communion with Christ and God; of physical life—the life of the body—which is the result of these other two—are inextricably mixed and blended in the thought of St. Paul. He treats them all at once, as if each implied the other, and as if they had all one common origin, though at the same time he distributes his language somewhat according to its particular appropriateness to the subject of which he happens to be treating. The faith and love of the Christian rise to union with Christ. That union touches every part of the Christian's career, just as it touches every part of the saving work of Christ. The two stand over against and correspond to each other. In the strength of his faith and love for Christ the Christian is gradually enabled to suppress the solicitations of sense, so that they cease to annoy him. That is to die, or be crucified with Christ, to mortify the members that are in the flesh. In the strength of his faith and love for Christ the Christian comes to set his affections on things above; that is, to rise with Christ. And this present resurrection with Christ is the earnest of a future resurrection in which the body also will share.

In this way St. Paul makes provision for the whole of the Christian's career. The initial part of the process is what is commonly called justification. The continuation and completion of it is what is commonly called sanctification.

The great step in the first is the admission of the

Christian into the Messianic kingdom, and his consequent introduction into a state of things the essential character of which is righteousness and peace, instead of guilt and punishment. The great step in the second is the mystical union or communion with Christ, through which the purifying and vivifying influences of the Spirit of Christ Himself are communicated to the believer.

The connecting link between the two halves of the process is faith. It is faith by virtue of which the Christian is admitted into the Messianic kingdom, and becomes partaker of its immunities. Faith in the Messiah is the necessary condition of acceptance by the Messiah; and direct acceptance by the Messiah alone can exempt from the dominion and obligation of the law.

But, on the other hand, it is this very same faculty, faith, the ardent and sincere devotion to the Head of the Messianic kingdom, which, by the relation of intimacy that it establishes between the subject and the King, opens out to that subject the fulness of the Messianic blessings. Faith in Christ is the root, of which the life in Christ is the perfected blossom and flower: it is the same feeling and faculty in another and more developed form.

It will be observed, too, that the Christian sacraments have each their place in connection with these two great divisions of the process of salvation. Baptism marks the commencement of the Christian's career, the step by which he is admitted into the kingdom of the Messiah. It is under the New Covenant what circumcision was under the Old, the *seal* of the righteousness which is by faith, the formal act and deed

of ratification by which the Messianic or Christian privileges are secured to the believer, by which the state of righteousness is thrown open to him, and the state of sin with its load of past offences, typically and symbolically, washed away.

The Holy Communion bears the same relation to the renewal of the Christian's life through union with Christ. It is itself a typical and symbolical expression of that union; and, like all solemn and serious expression, it helps to strengthen the feelings which it expresses. Union with Christ is a spiritual thing, the closest influence of spirit upon spirit, that has its root in faith, and is itself a development of faith. And the rite by which this union is celebrated is an embodiment in material form of an act which is purely spiritual. It begins and ends in faith. Faith is the one great factor running through it all.

Men, as individuals, come and go; but the kingdom of heaven endures. It has a life beyond that of the individual, and its development is more continuous and unbroken. The establishment of the Messiah's kingdom upon earth is as yet incipient and imperfect. Nature and man alike are progressing towards a far more glorious consummation. At present, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain. The Messiah has come to it, but has been removed from it; and when He comes to it again, the whole inferior creation, animate and inanimate, will join in the glory of his appearing. The members of the Messianic kingdom, who, by virtue of their relation to the Messiah, are in a special sense *sons* of God, will enter upon the full privileges of their adoption: Their very mortal bodies will be transfigured, and the Messiah will be

among them as the first-born amongst many brethren. There can be no doubt that St. Paul expected the second coming of the Lord to take place speedily, in his own generation, if not in his own lifetime. The two parts of the Messiah's coming were to him the necessary complement of each other. The second appearing in glory was only the fitting counterpart and compensation for the first appearing in humiliation. The Jews were not prepared for the humiliating side of the Messiah's appearance. They looked only for the glorious side. And though the Apostle was fully reconciled to the first, he did not lose his hold upon the second. They were only separated in his mind by the teaching of experience. He, like the rest of the apostles, bore out the saying of their Lord, that the true day and hour of his appearing should not be known.

With this eschatology, or doctrine respecting the last things, the circle of the Apostle's teaching is closed. An attempt has been made, as far as possible, to see it with the eyes of the Apostle himself, to follow the train of thought by which it was arrived at, and to see the relation of the different parts of his system to each other in his own mind. The question will perhaps naturally be asked whether too much prominence is not thus given to the particular form of the Jewish Messianic expectations—a form which, though containing in itself a large permanent element, was not itself permanent, but was rather the transitory historical clothing of an idea to which we are accustomed to give a different expression.

However this may be, there can be no doubt that the Messianic idea, as it was current among the Jews,

held a large place in the mind of St. Paul. The ideas that he had imbibed before his conversion remained with him after it, and Jewish became the parent of Christian theology.

But, apart from this, there is reason to think that, if the lineage and relations of the leading terms in this theology had been more considered, it would have saved many mistakes and much superficial and inadequate reasoning.

For instance, does it not tend greatly to deepen our conception of justification by faith and the doctrine of imputed righteousness when we see it in its place in the Apostle's system? Objection has been made to this very doctrine. The idea of imputation has been denounced as immoral. Righteousness, it is said, cannot be imputed. A man is righteous, or he is not righteous. He cannot be considered or accounted righteous unless he is so really.

If such were the stern alternative, what would become of the human race? It is indeed quite true that, when it is stated in a dry scholastic form, the doctrine of imputed righteousness is open to objection. But how far removed is the theology of St. Paul from a dry and lifeless scholasticism! On the contrary, it is instinct with the most burning enthusiastic life. The faith by virtue of which righteousness is imputed is no hard intellectual abstraction. It is a personal devotion to a personal Messiah, in which all the seeds of the finest and highest Christian morality lie enshrined. It was never intended that such faith should be a substitute for virtuous conduct. Its purpose was much rather to substitute a living and real virtue for one that was merely cold and mechanical—the virtue of the saint

for the virtue of the Pharisee. And if, when all is done, there is still need for imputed righteousness, what is this but the necessary condition of human frailty? What man among us could hope to stand in his own self guiltless before God? The doctrine that deifies humanity, and that talks much of human perfectibility, is one of the very shallowest that ever was invented. If man is to approach nearer to perfection, it is not by a self-complacent survey of his own achievements, but by seeing and lamenting his sinfulness, and by serious efforts to amend.

Nor can that other step be regarded as unreasonable. If God *is* willing to pardon the offences and shortcoming of men—to treat as righteous those who are not in themselves really righteous—is it not to be expected that this favour should be extended specially to those who have entered with ardour into the service of his Son? That ardour is in itself the surest guarantee that they will do the best that in them lies. And so far from the relation of the believer to his Lord being taken *in lieu of* a holy life, it is treated by St. Paul as the constant motive to it, the ever present spur and stimulus which will not let the Christian forget who he is and to what he is called.

Thus one of the two main difficulties in the Pauline theology would seem to be sufficiently answered. The other has been hinted at but not as yet discussed, the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. Yet does not this too receive a light from the consideration of its historical antecedents and the ideas to which it is related? There can be little doubt that St. Paul does regard the death of Christ as sacrificial, and sacrificial in the sense of being expiatory or at least propitiatory. It had not

merely the effect of awakening human affection by a transcendent act of love and sufferings voluntarily endured, but it also had a determining influence upon the Divine Will. It did in some way serve to render God propitious towards man. This side of it is not to be ignored or explained away. But two things are to be borne in mind. First, that the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross does not stand alone. It is not an isolated act, but is rather the culminating act in a long series. The idea of sacrifice is almost as old as the human race. It goes back beyond the existence of written records, and is diffused over nations of the most diverse origin. Wide-spread and deeply-rooted ideas like this are not to be despised. There is something more in them than appears upon the surface. They are part of the vast Divine plan which is unfolded by little and little in the government of the world. One advantage of the theory of evolution as applied to the history of religions is that it brings out this profound unity in the whole God-appointed system of things. It takes perhaps ages to reveal the true final cause or goal of a prolonged series of events; but in the end that goal is revealed, and then at once the antecedent steps that led up to it are illuminated as they had never been before.

Secondly, it must be remembered that we look at these things not from above but from below. We see only the under side of them. We speak, as St. Paul spoke, of a "sacrifice propitiatory" to God. But what do we know of the why, or the how, of these tremendous ideas? If there is any field where shallow and flippant curiosity is out of place, it is here. What are we, that we should undertake to define the relations that exist within the incomprehensible sphere of the

Godhead? Our language is anthropomorphic. We use human metaphors to express ideas which we feel far transcend them. Such language must be inadequate and mixed to a certain extent with error. There are certain things which are partly before and partly behind the veil. We must take what we see, and leave what is unseen.

The root idea of the redeeming death of Christ is one that must not at any price be let slip. It is one of the great factors in the religious life. The obvious difficulties connected with it have led some amiable and good men to try to explain it away. But this cannot be done without serious detriment to religion. Explain away the redeeming death of Christ, and the work of salvation becomes a subjective process. It is wrought out by the man himself. It begins, and ends, with him. He, and not Christ, is the centre of the Christian scheme. Salvation is a matter of human effort, and no longer the free gift of God. On the other hand, *For us and not by us* is the watchword of St. Paul. *For us and not by us* is the key to a truly chastened and humble Christian temper.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me.

There is the true motive power of Christianity. History would prove it if theology did not, for the consciousness of it has been strongest in the greatest and most creative religious minds.

It is this which constitutes the strength of the theology of St. Paul. He has cast the anchor of his faith outside himself. He himself will boast of nothing. He himself can do nothing, but he can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him. Thus the great paradox

is solved. In the moment of his deepest humiliation, when the "stake" (or "thorn," as it is called in our Version) is driven far into his quivering flesh, when he feels helpless and all but hopeless, he casts himself unreservedly upon Christ. And he receives an answer: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Therefore," he adds, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak then am I strong." His spirit is at once exalted and humble. The most commanding energy does not make him proud. The most unconquerable fortitude does not make him hard. Though he had "laboured more than they all," he yet counts himself less than the least. He knows how to be abased as well as how to abound.

St. Paul is himself the best commentary upon his own theology. His life was inspired by his theology, and his theology is the reflection of his life. It is no scholastic system, worked out in the cold atmosphere of the study. It is the fruit of an intense religious experience, the victorious result of prolonged inward conflict. We seem to trace at almost every step in it how the old has been fused into the new. But the fusion is complete. Unseen forces have been at work upon it. Never was there a soul that might so truly be said to be "baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

W. SANDAY.
