

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE HISTORICAL CHRIST OF ST. PAUL.*

II. THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

1 CORINTHIANS i. 2, 26.—It has been a favourite averment since the days of Bolingbroke that St. Paul is the founder of Christian theology. The contrast is repeatedly drawn between the simple practical precepts addressed to the fishermen of Galilee, and the abstruse Platonic philosophy which pervades the Pauline treatises. We are told that the Christ of early Christendom was to the mind of that Christendom altogether dissociated from theology, that his memory was revered simply as a great teacher of morals, whose greatness mainly consisted in the adaptability of his teaching to the common wants of commonplace men. Christianity, in fact, was but a vivified Judaism, and its Founder but an advanced prophet. A very important question comes to be, Is this true as a matter of history? St. Paul is certainly a Christian theologian: is he the founder of Christian theology? is his theological view of Christ radically different from the prevailing view of his time? If we were permitted to assume the genuineness of the first Epistle of St. Peter, it would set the matter at rest. The Christ of that Epistle is essentially a theological conception; and were it proved to be the conception of a man who is commonly regarded as St. Paul's adversary, it would demonstrate an unity of faith in the early Church. We dare not, however, take for granted the genuineness of St. Peter's Epistle; and we are constrained to look elsewhere for an answer. We turn to St. Paul himself, to see if we can discover any evidence of the theological sentiments of that age to which he wrote. On the very threshold of his first Epistle to the Church of Corinth, we are arrested by the fact that the Apostle is addressing men whom, in spite of seemingly irreconcilable differences, he believes to be

bound together by a faith in something more fundamental than their differences. That Church, as we learn from this Epistle, had been rent asunder by various sects; there was a party of Paul, a party of Apollos, a party of Peter, and a Messianic sect calling themselves the party of Christ. St. Paul is quite aware of the fact, and makes it abundantly evident throughout his writings how important he holds the differences to be. But what we have to observe is that, important as he holds them to be, he is not afraid to regard the men who display them as the members of a common church of God, whom he can address in a common Christian Epistle; he considers their point of union far more vital than their points of disagreement. That point of union is a purely theological article, the worship of the Founder of Christianity; for St. Paul thus expresses the one unity in the many diversities: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth . . . with all that in every place *call upon the name* of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

It cannot be said that St. Paul is the founder of *this* theology; he makes it the distinctive creed of a Church which, by his own admission, numbers amongst its members those who hold religious opinions diametrically opposite to his. We find, then, within little more than twenty years after the death of the Christian Founder, that his followers, divided widely as the poles on many points, were at one on a great theological dogma, the calling on Christ's Name in the act of worship. It may be said, indeed, that even in five and twenty years there was time for Christianity to transform itself from the religion of humble fishermen and tax-gatherers into the religion of Platonists and Stoics, time for it to gather votaries from the ranks of the metaphysical and the learned. The answer is furnished by Verse 26 of this same Chapter, where it is distinctly affirmed that the Christian votaries of St. Paul's day were selected from the

valleys of the earth: "See your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." The theological teaching of St. Paul was, by his own admission, addressed to primitive and uncultured men. He was far too acute a man, and far too versatile in his powers of adaptation, to have adopted any such course if he had been conscious that he was adopting it for the first time. He must have known well that these primitive men, by their very profession of Christianity, had entered into a theological atmosphere. The fact that a man of such penetrating intellect ventured to address a company of peasants and labourers in language which demanded and presupposed a power of theological understanding, and that too little more than twenty years after the departure of the Christian Founder, is itself an incontrovertible proof that the belief in that Founder had from the earliest times been associated with some form of theological thought.

Let us here remark, by the way, that in this Verse 26 we have a confirmation of the view made familiar to us by our Gospels, that Christianity *did* begin with primitive men. Without the testimony of St. Paul, and on the supposition that our Gospels date from the second century, we should have no evidence in the world that Christianity had not begun with the aristocracy, unless indeed such evidence be found in the testimony of the catacombs. As it is, we have a narrative of the life of the Christian Founder which is permeated throughout by the idea that his teaching is addressed to the child-life of humanity. He Himself is made to exclaim with rapture: "I thank Thee, O Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." He is made to take a little child in his arms as the distinctive symbol of his coming kingdom, to promise that kingdom to the poor in spirit, to offer his "rest" to the labouring and heavy laden. He is represented as recognizing an antagonism between

the love of worldly possessions and the love of that Father whom He professed to reveal; and therefore He speaks of worldly possessions as men speak of things which involve danger. He calls his disciples from the lower ranks of life. It is not, indeed, a rule without exception; there are here and there indications that Christianity is adapted to the mountains as well as to the valleys. We have the Nicodemus of St. John, the Arimathean Joseph of St. Matthew, and the "most excellent Theophilus" who figures in the dedication of St. Luke. But these are rather prophetic than representative men; they point to future possibilities of the Gospel; they do not yet indicate its present social strength. That strength is everywhere represented as weak, composed of men whom the Master addresses as a "little flock," and recruited from the highways and the hedges of life; it is the *common people* who hear Him gladly.

Now this is precisely the picture which St. Paul draws. It is the picture of a religion making its way up from the valleys, and gathering within its pale chiefly the dwellers in those valleys. It is, indeed, not implied that Christianity had made no converts amongst the wise and rich and noble of this world; the phrase "*not many*" indicates beyond doubt that some such converts had been made. But here, as in our Gospels, the calls of the rich and noble are the exception, not the rule. The religion of the Christian Founder makes its most powerful appeal to the child-life of humanity, and exerts its most powerful influence over those whom the world had not favoured.

I *Corinthians* ii. 8.—"Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." There are two distinct points in this passage. The first is the enunciation of the mode of Christ's death, crucifixion. The reader may be disposed to say, Who ever doubted it? No one, certainly; but it is

this very fact which, in our view, gives it an apologetic importance. It has often occurred to us that the doctrine of the crucifixion has made a narrow escape from the mythical theory. An orthodox Christian derives his knowledge of that doctrine from three sources; from our four Gospels, including the Acts; from one or two scanty references in classical writers; and from the New Testament Epistles. The negative school puts the four Gospels out of court by making them fabrications of the second century, and, in its most destructive form, makes the New Testament Epistles, with four exceptions, later forgeries of the first century. Now let us suppose that all classical reference to the mode of Christ's death had been omitted, and that the four acknowledged Pauline Epistles had been silent as to the fact of the Crucifixion: would there not have been a strong temptation on the part of the negative critics to account for the idea of the cross in Christianity on a purely mythical principle? It is curious to reflect how easily this particular doctrine would have lent itself to the system of Strauss, and how plausibly it would have fitted in with a theory which explained everything by the growth of poetic imaginations. We should have found the school of Tübingen expressing itself somewhat like this: "It is not difficult to trace the process by which the thought of a crucified Christ became crystallized into a historical fact. From the days of Plato downward there had been a close and constant association between the idea of the perfect man and the idea of the cross. Plato himself had declared that the perfect man, whenever he should come, would be of all men the most reviled; he would appear throughout life to be unjust even while he was just; though doing no wrong, he would have the greatest reputation for wrong doing; he would be scourged; last of all, after suffering every kind of evil, he would be crucified. The Greek philosopher having here skilfully joined together the extremes of life,

and having associated the thought of perfection with the idea of a slave's death, what more natural than that such an association should be perpetuated? The conquests of Alexander, having blended the Greeks and Jews, produced an amalgamation between Judaism and Platonism. The search for a legal perfection had all along been a distinctively Jewish element; and the life of the Christian Founder, persecuted and sorrowful as it was, had seemed to supply such an ideal: was it not to be expected that, in connecting their ideal of perfection with the admitted fact of a sad life prematurely closed, the mind of Platonized Judaism should fasten upon that symbol of the cross which Plato had already ennobled by association with the perfect man?"

We have given this imaginary quotation simply to shew how easily the most undoubted fact in the world could have had the belief in it accounted for on other grounds than its truth. We pass, now, to the second apologetic point in the passage before us. St. Paul declares, not only that Christ was crucified, but that He was crucified under the form of a state prosecution. His life was taken away, not in a tumultuary rising of the people, but under the semblance of legal enactment, authorized by the existing powers of government, "the princes of this world." He goes on to state further that the state prosecution was dictated by a mistaken view of the Christian Founder's object, that, had the princes of this world "known" the real state of the case, they would not have authorized the prosecution. Let us examine this for a few moments.

In the preceding Verses St. Paul has been maintaining that his preaching among the Corinthians had been distinguished by its unworldliness. It had avoided all the methods of rhetorical expediency, had eschewed enticing speech and the appeal to motives of worldly wisdom. It had, however, employed a wisdom of its own; and the remembrance of the fact leads St. Paul to contrast the maxims of expediency

with the wisdom of God. The peculiarity of the latter he declares to be its hiddenness, its mysteriousness, its inwardness ; it is altogether unlike the policy of kings, because the wisdom of the princes of this world aims exclusively at outward dominion. And here St. Paul cannot but remark how utterly these princes mistook the nature of the heavenly wisdom when they gave their consent to the Crucifixion. They thought that the Messiah claimed to be a prince of their own order ; whereas He claimed to be a Prince of peace, to subjugate by subduing the *soul*. If the worldly princes had comprehended the hidden and unobtrusive nature of this Messianic plan of government, they would never have experienced the slightest fear in the presence of the Christian Founder ; and in their freedom from fear they would have allowed Him to pursue his way ; they would not have " crucified the Lord of glory " had they known that his was a celestial glory.

This, we are convinced, is St. Paul's meaning ; without such a train of thought we cannot see why " the princes " should have been introduced at all in such a connection. But, taking this as his meaning, one cannot but remark how beautifully it fits in with our ordinary conception of the historical Christ. We see from our Gospels that the Son of Man was rejected alike by the people and by the princes ; but the motive for which He was rejected by the people was the opposite of the motive for which He was rejected by the princes. The people rejected Him because his kingdom was not of this world, because He refused to receive the hosannas of the Messianic Son of David ; the princes condemned Him because they feared that his kingdom might be too much of this world, and might endanger the stability of Judaic or Roman dominion. Therefore it is that in our Gospels the beginning and the end of his personal manifestation are signalized by opposition from the civil powers ; his birth is disturbed by the persecutions of Herod ; his

death is hastened by the suspicions of Pilate ; and the very epitaph written in mockery above his cross attests that the princes of this world mistook the nature of his glory. If this Gospel history was not the history which St. Paul knew, he must have known one which exhibited precisely the same principles and revealed precisely the same elements of human nature. Whatever may be said of the identity of individual facts and names, this at least is clear, that the allusion of the Apostle in this passage presupposes the existence and the knowledge of a history whose facts and whose actions point to an identical moral. With such a conviction in view, there is created for our Gospel history a very strong preliminary bias, a bias which grows not out of prejudice, but is itself the product of fact. If the Gospel history which St. Paul knew illustrates the same principle which is taught in our Gospels, it will require very strong evidence indeed to shake our conviction that the historical incidents of St. Paul were identical with those with which we are now familiar.

1 *Corinthians* iv. 5, 17.—In Verse 17 we have almost the direct statement of a principle which we have already shewn to be involved in St. Paul's teaching, and shall hereafter shew still more plainly. The point to which we refer lies in the words : " Who shall bring you into remembrance of *my ways which be in Christ*, as I teach everywhere in every church." St. Paul here declares that the substance of his teaching to every church was what he believed to be the Christian revelation : " my ways in Christ." He does not profess to have any ways out of Christ, or, in other words, to teach authoritatively any doctrine which rests merely upon his conviction as an individual ; whatever he utters, he believes himself to utter as the mouthpiece of the Christian Founder. The result is that many things in St. Paul's writings, which seem to be purely didactic,

presuppose the knowledge of a Gospel history. Let us take, as a specimen, his views on the last judgment, to which we have access in Verse 5 of this same Chapter.

He says in that passage, "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." The first thing which strikes us here is his command to suspend judgment. At a time of religious enthusiasm, and in a sphere so marked by seemingly vital religious differences as the Church of Corinth was, such a command was very bold, and would not have been given by St. Paul unless he had believed himself to have warrant for it. He would find such warrant in the words of St. Matthew (vii. 1), provided the Christian Founder spoke those words. And as in St. Matthew vii. 1 the deprecation of human judgment is associated with the imminence of Divine judgment, so is it here; he says, "Judge nothing *until the Lord come.*" Observe how incidental is the reference to the second coming of Christ; it is not stated, but assumed as something which every Christian had reason to expect. Whence this assumption on the part of St. Paul? whence this expectation on the part of his contemporaries? Not, clearly, from the promises of the Old Testament; for the Old Testament only speaks of one coming. The expectation must have been derived from the belief that the Christian Founder had promised to return. In our Gospels, even in that which is farthest removed from millenarianism, such a promise is given (St. John xiv. 3). It is declared in St. Matthew (x. 26) that the hidden glory of Christ shall give place to a time of revelation, when there shall be nothing hidden which shall not be manifested, and when the words now spoken in the ear shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. So here St. Paul connects the second coming with the age of manifestation: "*until He come who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.*" With St.

Paul the manifestation is itself the judgment. This appears yet more clearly in 2 Corinthians v. 10: "We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Whence does the Apostle derive this conception of a coming Messianic judgment seat? The natural impulse would be to answer, from the prophetic kingdom of Daniel. If St. Paul had been still a Jew sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, that answer would have been amply sufficient; but St. Paul was a Christian of a very pronounced, that is to say, a very anti-Judaic type, who magnified exceedingly what we now call the first coming of the Son of Man, and who held distinctly that in that coming the prophetic kingdom of Daniel had already been set up, that kingdom which we have heard him, in a previous Section, declare to be "not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The truth is that, for a Christian of the first century, and particularly for a Pauline Christian, the Old Testament prophecies could only continue to be prophetic by being renewed. With his strong tendency to spiritualize the Hebrew Scriptures, St. Paul would have had no difficulty whatever in believing that the ancient prophetic visions of Messianic glory had all been fulfilled in the incarnate life of the Son of Man. He did not hold this; and the question is, why? It was surely a violent process on the part of one who believed in the inspiration of the Old Testament to thrust into that Testament what he must have known not to be there, the doctrine of two Messianic advents. *Did* he thrust it into the Old Testament? Must he not rather have been drawing upon what he believed to be a subsequent revelation? Was there such a subsequent revelation? If we believe our Gospel history, there was. In St. Matthew (xxv. 31) the Christian Founder is represented as predicting that He would come again in an

attitude of revealed majesty, and on a mission of Divine judgment. All nations would be gathered before Him, and He would indicate to every soul its moral place in the universe of being; He would set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left. If that were a historical fact, and if St. Paul knew it to be a fact, he would have had from his point of view an ample warrant for his great expectation. At all events we are entitled to say that the expectation in which he indulged admits of no explanation so rational as the existence of some such historical tradition as our Gospels have handed down.

Let us now turn to 1 Corinthians vi. 2, that we may see the same subject from another angle. In that Verse we find these words, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" "Know ye not?" the Apostle appeals to an experience outside his own, clearly shewing that the doctrine which he enunciates is not a mythical or subjective growth of his own mind, but something which is already the possession of the Church. What is that doctrine? Viewed in the light of St. Paul's previous sentiments, it is a statement startling enough. He has already exalted the Messiah to the pinnacle of absolute dominion, by placing Him on the seat of universal judgment; here, almost immediately afterwards, he seems to take away with his left hand that majesty which he has conceded with his right. If the saints also are to sit on the judgment seat, where is the pre-eminence of the Son of Man? Of course, from our standpoint of Christian experience, we all understand what St. Paul meant; he meant that the members of Christ's body would be sharers in the Messianic reign, and in the Messianic power of discernment. But the question is, How have we reached, how has Paul himself reached, this standpoint of Christian experience? He never obtained it from heathendom; for saints had there no kingdom. He never obtained it from Judaism; for to the Jew the thought

of a man, however holy, sitting with God on the throne of the universe would have been blasphemous in the extreme. Everything was against the possibility of a mythical origin for this idea in the mind of the Apostle; and yet it was in his mind. Where did he get it? what was his warrant for it? Once again we are bound to state that, if we accept the testimony of our Gospels, such a warrant can be found. If we believe with St. Matthew (xix. 28), and St. Luke (xxii. 30), that the Christian Founder promised his disciples the privilege of sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, if we believe in the promise uttered to the sons of Zebedee that such a privilege would be granted to all those whose hearts the Father had prepared for it, whatever meaning we may or may not attach to the words in question, we shall at least be able to understand how a Christian Apostle, of a spirit habitually humble, should have felt himself warranted to say, without contradicting his humility, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?"

1 *Corinthians* v. 4, 5.—"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus." Our difficulty in the treatment of this passage is to avoid the temptation to interpret it subjectively. Were we writing a homily, such a course would be as easy as it would be necessary. But our province here is limited to the work of the apologist; and such a work demands a strictly historical mental attitude. We wish, therefore, as much as possible to disregard metaphysical subtleties, and to try if, by an effort of intellectual sympathy, we can throw ourselves back into the thoughts and beliefs of the primitive Christian age. In the passage before us we have, in the first instance, a sentence of excommunication which the Apostle claims the power to

pronounce, through an authority delegated to him by the Christian Founder. If we admit the statement of our Gospels that, whatsoever the apostles bound on earth was to be bound in heaven, and whatsoever they loosed on earth was to be loosed in heaven, we shall find a warrant for St. Paul's claim (St. Matt. xvi. 19; xviii. 18, 20). But the passage contains something more than a sentence of excommunication; it clearly points to the infliction of some positive pain. That pain is defined in the remarkable words, "delivered unto Satan." Have we any clue to the meaning of this expression? Is there anything resembling it with which we have been made familiar by our present Gospels? It seems to us that there is one, and only one, such thought; the idea which has come down to us by the name of demoniacal possession.

There are three points which clearly reveal themselves in relation to this primitive belief as it is manifested in the New Testament. First, it was the popular opinion that evil spirits, or demons, were permitted at times to enter into the bodies of human beings; the demoniacal possession consisted, therefore, in a *bodily* or *physical* empire of Satan. Second, the demons only entered the body because sin had already possessed the soul; the demoniacal possession bore therefore the character of a penal infliction. Third, when the demons entered the body, they produced upon that body a destroying or lacerating influence; the demoniacal possession was therefore a destruction of the flesh; it bred disease.

Now these three elements will be found united in the present passage; but, in addition to them, there will be found a fourth, and for the most part a new, element. St. Paul declares that the purpose of the suffering inflicted by the delivery unto Satan is, ultimately, not penal but remedial; its design is exorcism; it aims at casting out the evil spirit; the destruction of the flesh is only instrumental to

the salvation of the soul. The flesh was regarded as the seat of lustful desires ; and therefore the crucifixion of the flesh was looked upon as the emancipation of the spirit from these desires. Satan is here made to play the part of an unconscious Divine emissary ; he casts out himself. Now is there any principle on which we could explain this transmutation in the idea of the Gospels, on the supposition that the delivery unto Satan was identical with the demoniacal possession of a former generation ? We think there is such a principle. It has been often pointed out that, in the change from one religion to another, the gods of the old faith become the demons of the new ; and it is highly probable that in the popular opinion the evil spirits of the primitive Christian age were held to be those very deities whom the past age had worshipped. But there was this difference between Christianity and all other religions, that it was essentially an eclectic faith ; it sought to transmute foreign and adverse agencies into voluntary or involuntary emissaries. Satan himself was not, as in Parseeism, a power independent of God ; he was at any time capable of being made an involuntary messenger of God. Was it not natural that the demoniacal possession which, in the first Christian generation, was looked upon as the unqualified antagonist of the Divine Life, should, in the second, be regarded as unconsciously working out, by its very power of fleshly destructiveness, a new birth of spiritual being ? We may remark that, in our opinion, the same transmutation is observable in the salvation by fire of 1 Corinthians iii. 15 ; the Gehenna of the later Judaism is at least allowed to suggest the idea of a fire whose office, like that of the third person of the Brahmanical trinity, is to destroy in order that he may recreate. We believe that, on this principle, the new attitude of Satan's work, in relation to the Divine Kingdom, can be vindicated consistently with the admission of its identity with the older view of demoniacal possession.

Nor are we by any means sure that the germ of such a transformation is not to be found in the Gospels themselves. Physical suffering is there regarded as essentially a Satanic work, Christ speaks of an afflicted woman as one "whom Satan hath bound." And yet there are not wanting indications that physical suffering itself will prove remedial, that Satan will be defeated by his own weapons. We are told that one species of demons "goeth not out but by prayer and *fasting*"; and this last word, pointing as it does to an attenuation of the flesh, brings us very near the Pauline idea. We are told if our eye offend us to pluck it out, and if our hand offend us to cut it off; we are told of a baptism by fire, and that "every one shall be salted with fire." In the third Gospel especially, which approaches most nearly to the Pauline type, we are made to feel that, in the opinion of the Evangelist at least, there is an advantage in the endurance of physical sorrow; and we are prepared for such a revelation as we receive from the lips of St. Paul, that the delivery unto Satan may issue in the salvation of the soul.

If our solution of this problem be accepted, we shall have in the Pauline Epistles a direct reference to the largest and most frequent class of the miracles recorded in our Gospels. It is, apologetically, a matter of indifference to us whether the suffering which St. Paul professes to inflict were produced by natural or by supernatural means. If it be held that it was simply of the nature of Catholic penance, we shall not, for the purposes of this inquiry, oppose the view. The apologetic point is that, in whatever way the suffering was produced, it was believed by St. Paul to have a supernatural effect, the effect indeed of *changing* the nature. It was a process of exorcism, instituted *in the name of Christ*, and believed to be conducted *by the power of Christ*; and nothing is more certain than that, in the eye of the Apostle, he was doing a work so momentous as to be a sign of his Apostolic mission. He labours to tell the Church

of Corinth that, when they assemble for this solemn act, his spirit will be in the midst of them. Without, however, pressing the acceptance of this solution in all its details, we shall simply ask the reader to arrive at this conclusion: that in the days of St. Paul there was practised in the Church of Corinth a species of ecclesiastical discipline which had in view the exorcism of evil, and which powerfully reminds us of some of those phenomena which our Gospels have associated with the cure of demoniacal possession.

1 *Corinthians* vii. 7, 10.—We begin with Verse 10, as it is the key of the position. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, let not the wife depart from her husband.” The Apostle is here directing the Corinthian Church in relation to a definite and specific point of morals. It is a point on which any man might be expected to have an individual opinion, because it relates to practical life, and is in no sense concerned with transcendental beliefs. Nevertheless, St. Paul distinctly declares that his ethical decision on this point must be based upon the mandate of the Christian Founder; that the morality which He teaches must be not a Pauline, but a distinctly Christian, morality: “*I command, yet not I, but the Lord.*” It may be said, admitting this fact, how does it follow that St. Paul derived this command from the utterance of the Christ of history? may it not have been something which he believed to have been communicated to him in one of those ecstatic visions to which he was so subject? We shall peril this and all such questions upon the result of a future Section, upon what in legal phraseology may be called a test case, the institution of the Sacrament of Communion. If we shall find in that Section that St. Paul is referring to matters of actual history, we shall be warranted in seeking a historical basis for all those things which he professes to “have received of the Lord”; if we shall find, on the contrary,

that the matters there treated of have no historical basis, we shall be warranted in concluding that the whole structure of the Pauline morality was derived by him from supposed communion with a Christ who was transcendental and unhistorical.

In the meantime, however, and in relation to the passage immediately before us, there is one highly pertinent question: Have we, in our historical Gospels, any record of such a command as is here imputed to the Christian Founder? If we had none, it would by no means follow, in this instance, that the Christ of Paul was unhistorical; for the command might have been derived from some oral tradition which has not been incorporated in any Gospel, and of whose echoes there is no trace beyond the Apostle's testimony. Here, however, we are in no such difficulty; we can point to a command in our Gospels which might well have furnished the Apostle's warrant. The irrefragable nature of the marriage tie is expressed in St. Matthew v. 32, with a single qualification, and is repeated without qualification in St. Mark x. 12. We feel that the Apostle, in this instance at least, is on the lines of sober and authentic history.

And we are confirmed in this persuasion when we fall back on Verse 7 of this Chapter: "For I would that all men were even as I myself; but every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." In spite of every attempt to refine away the passage there can, we think, be no doubt that St. Paul means to say: "I wish that all men were unmarried." There is every reason to believe that he cherished the hope of a speedy advent, a hope which might well have had its ground in a too historical interpretation of the promise that the first generation should not pass until the Christian consummation were fulfilled. But apart altogether from this question, he felt, as he himself tells us, that the age in which he lived

was a time of distress in which a man would best support his burden by being free from family cares. On these grounds St. Paul had no scruple in indicating, at this juncture, his preference of the unmarried to the married state. Yet he will not indicate more than a preference, he refuses to issue a command; and in this reticence it is reasonable to suppose he was sustained by some precept believed to have been uttered by the historical Christ. His language is very peculiar, that is to say, it is so on the supposition that no such precept had been uttered; he declares the ability to abstain from marriage to be a *gift*. We know the high place assigned to gifts in the primitive Christian Church: is it not rather a bold stroke of the Apostle to rank amidst them so seemingly trivial a power? We do not think he would have done so on his own responsibility; he must have thought he had warrant for it. If our Gospels be true, he had such a warrant and a warrant signed in almost identical terms.<sup>1</sup> In St. Matthew xix. 11, when the disciples declare that the irrefragable nature of the marriage tie makes marriage undesirable, the Christian Founder is represented as having answered: "All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is *given*." Here we have the very thought<sup>2</sup> of the Pauline Epistle; the ability to abstain from marriage is spoken of as something which is *given*; notwithstanding its secular sphere, notwithstanding its seeming commonplaceness, it is placed on a level with those powers and capacities which are supposed to be the direct emanations of the Divine Spirit; and the language of the Apostle becomes intelligible when it can point to a precedent in the language of the Master.

1 *Corinthians* viii. 12.—"But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, *ye sin against*

<sup>1</sup> We mean as to idea; the Greek in each is quite different.

<sup>2</sup> The words rendered "given" and "gifts," though from different roots, both imply the descent of Divine influence.

*Christ.*" Here is another of those bold sayings so frequent in the writings of St. Paul. The frequency, indeed, tends to make us forget the boldness. We are so accustomed to a Christian atmosphere that we find it very difficult to put ourselves in the place of those outside of such an atmosphere, or to understand how paradoxical the promulgation of Christian sentiments must have sounded to them. In this passage St. Paul virtually identifies the life of the humblest believer with the life of that Being whom he worshipped as Divine. The sentiment must have produced upon the adherents of the Jewish theocracy an effect precisely similar to that which the pantheistic utterances of Mr. Emerson are apt to produce upon a Calvinist; precisely similar in kind, but much more intense in degree. For it must be remembered that the most rigid Calvinist of the nineteenth century is mild in his aversion to Pantheism in comparison with the adherent of the Jewish theocracy; the very essence of Judaism was the transcendence and the incommunicableness of God. It must be remembered also that this doctrine of Divine incommunicableness was still held by a large number even of professing Christians; the Christ of many was as yet only the Messiah after the flesh. The Christ of St. Paul was not such a Messiah; He was declared to be the very Son of God. But, in addition to this doctrine, which had at least its verbal parallels in the Old Testament, St. Paul proclaimed another which the Jew must have found it very difficult to receive; it was the communication of the Divine Sonship to the Messiah's followers. He held that the essential life of Christ had passed into the life of the meanest Christian believer, so that what was affirmed of the one might fitly be predicated of the other. In the Verse immediately under consideration he expresses this identity in rather striking terms; to wound a Christian of weak conscience is declared to be an injury inflicted on the person of the Christian Founder. A weak

conscience is a purely personal experience ; it is something which belongs to a man in special circumstances. Is it not somewhat startling in St. Paul to say that a wound which strikes a man in the special point which constitutes his weakness should be felt by the Divine life as an insult offered to its own strength? Surely this must have been one of the statements which the Apostle believed himself warranted to make by Divine command.

But if we turn to St. Matthew xxv. 40, and if we accept that passage as an authentic utterance of the historical Christ, the paradox of St. Paul's language will altogether vanish. Christ is there represented as sitting in the attitude of a King on the judgment throne of the universe, and apportioning rewards and punishments according to the deeds of men. These deeds of men are purely personal and historical acts, such as feeding the hungry and visiting the captive, or neglecting to feed and visit them. Yet Christ here puts Himself in the place of the weak ones who had been in need of succour. He appropriates to Himself the hunger, the thirst, the nakedness, the isolation, the captivity. He says that in relieving these, men had relieved Him ; that in refusing to relieve these, they had refused to relieve Him : " Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto *Me*." In that Gospel which is of all others the most Judaic, the most theocratic, the farthest removed from the Pantheistic element, we are confronted by a statement in full accord with the Pauline view, and professedly uttered by the great Head of the theocracy. If the authenticity of that statement be admitted, we shall see even in our most Judaic Gospel the germ of Pauline Christianity ; it is in the attitude of kinghood that Christ there appropriates the weakness of humanity ; and it is in the attitude of headship that St. Paul claims for Christ a participation in the wounds of the body.

G. MATHESON.