

# 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)

who were in Christ before us, that we find our best explanation of the sins which *are* unto death and of the sins which are *not* unto death, and come to understand how an inspired Apostle could affirm that that in us which is born of God cannot sin, and yet in the same breath confess that "if we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar." The better self, the better man in us—*this* is that in us which cannot sin, because it is born and quickened of God; the worse or lower self, the outward man of the flesh—*this* is that in us which commits sin, because as yet it is not redeemed from vanity and corruption, so that "the good we would we do not, and the evil which we would not, that we do." So long as this better self is gaining on, so long even as it is striving against, the lower unregenerate self, our sins are not sins unto death; but so soon as we cease from the strife with evil, and suffer the lower self to usurp an undisputed authority over us, we sin the sins which are unto death; we are no longer trying to obey the law of the mind; even the will to do good is no longer present with us.

S. Cox.

---

## THE HISTORICAL CHRIST OF ST. PAUL.

### II. FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

1 CORINTHIANS xi. 23-26.—We have now come to what has always appeared to us the most vital question in the whole field of apologetics—the genuineness of that narrative which St. Paul gives of the Last Supper. As we have already said, it is a test case; on our verdict upon it will depend our admission, or our denial, that the Christ whom St. Paul proclaimed was recognized by the Apostle himself as a Christ of history. But it is not merely, nor even mainly, on this ground that we attach apologetic importance to the Pauline

narrative of the Last Supper ; it is because, if this narrative is true, we are carried further back than the Apostolic age itself. If we have here a real historical incident, we have laid aside all second-hand testimony. We are no longer in the presence merely of the disciples of Jesus, however near they may have been to his person, and however conversant with his life ; we have found access to a testimony more direct and immediate still. We have come into the actual presence of the Christian Founder, have touched the hem of his garment, have heard his own utterances concerning Himself, and his own views concerning his mission. A document, undoubted even by the most sceptical, has put us in possession of certain words affirmed to have been uttered by the Founder of Christianity ; if that affirmation be true, we have passed altogether beyond the borders of indirect testimony, and are prepared to narrow the question of Christianity's truth or falsehood within the limits of the one inquiry, What did its Founder say of Himself ?

Notice two collateral points which, although incidental to the main subject, are of much interest to the Christian apologist. The first is the reference to the fact that Christ was *betrayed*. The reference is made in such a way as clearly to indicate that the act we now attribute to Judas Iscariot was thoroughly well known ; St. Paul does not say, "He was betrayed," he speaks of "the same night *in which* He was betrayed ;" the betrayal is only alluded to in order to mark the time of another occurrence. The second point is this note of time : "The same *night* in which He was betrayed." Here, again, it is taken for granted that the betrayal was *at night*, and that this fact also was well known to the Church. We recall the parallel in St. Matthew xxvi. 31, 34. We remember that, according to the testimony of our Gospels, the Son of Man went out *by night* from the observance of the Last Supper into the garden of Gethsemane ; that there, amidst the shadows, He passed his

hour of human agony ; and that immediately after emerging from his solitary meditation, He was surrounded by the company of the betrayer : the darkness of the inward hour seems to find its fitting mirror in the shadows of the outer night. We cannot help thinking that the fact of the Apostle having noticed so minute a circumstance lends a strong probability to the belief that the Christ on whom his thoughts were centred was a Christ of history.

Passing now to the main subject of the passage, we are confronted on the threshold by a very important question, What was St. Paul's motive in writing these words? Did he wish to prove what we are seeking to prove—the Divine institution of the Lord's Supper? Did he wish to tell the Corinthians what was the nature of that institution, why it was to be observed, or how it was to be celebrated? No such motives were in his mind. The Corinthians knew all about the Lord's Supper, and St. Paul was quite aware of the fact ; he speaks of it as something which he had already *delivered unto them*. It is clearly implied in Verse 26 (which is not Christ's utterance but Paul's), that the Corinthian Church was in the habit of celebrating this ordinance as a Divine institution. What, then, was St. Paul's motive in writing this passage? The key to the answer is furnished, we believe, in the opening words, "*I received from the Lord,*" with a special emphasis upon the word "I." Let us understand the position of affairs. The Church of Corinth, relaxing the vigour of its discipline as to the conditions of ecclesiastical membership, had admitted to the Lord's table persons not qualified to be there. St. Paul wrote to recall them to a sense of their duty. But he felt at the outset that his authority to do so might be disputed. He felt that the Corinthians might ask what right a man had to legislate apostolically on the Lord's Supper when he himself had not been one of those apostles to whom the personal hand of the Master had given the bread and wine? Accordingly he

seeks to anticipate the objection at the very first. What he says in effect is this: "Do not think that I have no authority to admonish you, because I did not witness the first communion; I have received the communion elements from the hands of the Lord as directly as did any of the Apostles. I have not simply *delivered unto you* a message for whose authority I have had to trust to the testimony of others; I received it from the Lord. I was indeed born out of due time, but that misfortune has been compensated. I was not present at that communion feast which preceded the crucifixion; but did not the Master promise there to drink the fruit of the vine anew with his disciples in his Father's kingdom? I was present at the fulfilment of that promise. When I joined the communion of the visible Church, I felt in my inmost soul that the bread and wine of which I was partaker were blessed to me by the special unseen *présence* of Him whose visible presence had blessed it to the other Apostles. My authority therefore is not inferior to theirs."

We hold, then, that what St. Paul claimed to have received of the Lord was not a knowledge of the *facts* of the Communion; but the Communion itself. In this view we have taken an intermediate position between an extreme supernatural and an extreme rationalistic standpoint; and it is only fair to state in what respect our theory differs from each of these.

The extreme supernatural view, which perhaps comprehends the majority of orthodox Commentators, is the belief that St. Paul received in a supernatural dream or vision a knowledge of all the facts relating to the institution of the Lord's Supper; that he was ignorant of the narrative of that night until it was thus miraculously revealed. The adoption of this view would in no sense weaken the argument of this Section; the question for the apologist is, not whence Paul received his information, but whether his in-

formation be true to the facts of history. All the same, we cannot for a moment adopt such an opinion. It is contrary to the principle of Divine economy that a man should be informed supernaturally of what he can learn from his natural faculties. Waiving this question, it seems to us impossible that, even before his conversion, St. Paul should have been ignorant that the Christians gave such an account of the institution of this ritual observance. Between the alleged date of the resurrection of Christ and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, there seem to have elapsed several years. They were years in which Christianity was much criticized by the Jewish nation. Is it credible that a leader of that nation never heard of the distinctive rite inaugurated by the Christian Founder until he was informed of its existence by a supernatural vision? We freely admit that the grammatical construction of the Verse appears to favour such a view; but every scholar knows that St. Paul's meaning cannot be reached by the simple process of parsing his sentences. We are not amongst those who seek to reduce the supernatural to a minimum; we would rather extend it into the sphere of law itself. We are actuated in this matter by no theological tendency, but by a purely judicial bias. Our objection to the theory that St. Paul learned supernaturally the institution and object of the Lord's Supper is founded solely on the belief, that such a theory removes the Apostle outside the circle of historical witnesses; and that, in so doing, it opens the door to that second or rationalistic theory to which we must now advert.

The rationalistic explanation of the passage before us is something like this. Paul was pervaded by the belief that he was in constant communion with his Lord. This abstract sentiment expressed itself one day in a concrete form. Paul had a natural dream, in which he seemed to see the Divine Being whom he loved, holding out to him the elements of bread and wine as symbols of communion,

and telling him that He had while on earth performed the same ceremony with the original disciples. The visions of the dream were to Paul realities; and therefore it became to him a Divine command. He proceeded to institute, as a universal ordinance for the Church, that which had come to him only as an individual experience; and what had been originally a vision of the night was crystallized into a rite of Christendom.

We think Mr. Hume has somewhere remarked that there is no opinion so absurd as not to have been held by some philosophers; in the present instance, such a conviction is needed to reconcile us to the idea that the men who support this theory are serious. The refutation of it grows out of the passage itself. St. Paul says that, on the night of his betrayal, the Lord brake the bread and gave it to his disciples. These disciples at the moment of St. Paul's writing were probably all alive, with two exceptions—Judas Iscariot and James the son of Zebedee. Nay, this is to understate the case. St. Paul had been instituting the Lord's Supper in the Gentile Churches for the last fifteen or twenty years. Our English version: "I *have* received of the Lord," is misleading; it sounds as if the Apostle claimed to have obtained a new experience. It ought to be, "I *received* of the Lord." The Apostle is speaking of an experience acquired in the far past, probably contemporaneous with his conversion. At that time all the disciples of the Last Supper, with the exception of Judas, were certainly alive. Now let us imagine that St. Paul's account of this matter had been the mythical embodiment of his own imagination. Let us suppose that there had never been a Last Supper, or that St. Paul had idealized the portrait of it; or that, in point of fact, the Christian Founder had not uttered those words which the Gentile Apostle attributed to Him. What would have been the consequence? Would not these disciples, to a man,

have risen to vindicate the historical accuracy of their own Christian tradition? The vindication would, for them, have been easy, and, for the Gentile Apostle, most crushing. They had only to say that they were never present at such a Supper, or that it was a common meal of hospitality unaccompanied by any mystic utterances of the Christian Founder. If they had said this, the name of Paul would have been handed down to posterity with that contempt and ridicule which are associated with those who have proved themselves the victims of fanaticism. And let us remember that, according to the negative school, the original disciples had the wish, if they had only possessed the power, thus to weaken the authority of the Gentile Apostle. Without admitting this, we are quite willing to grant, that in the first years of Christianity they were not at one with St. Paul as to the conditions of Church membership. On this account they would have looked with peculiar narrowness into St. Paul's view of the institution of Christian ordinances. Even after the writing of this Epistle, the leading men in the Church would have proved his account of the Last Supper to be false, had it not been incontrovertibly true. Peter and John, and perhaps James the son of Alphaeus, remained as living witnesses. Yet this account of St. Paul was accepted by all branches and parties of the Church, and has come down to us incorporated in those four Gospels which, whatever be said of their origin and authenticity, are recognized by the negative critics themselves as representatives of those phases of thought which pervaded the life of early Christendom.

We conclude, then, that the Pauline account of the Last Supper is the statement of a historical fact which cannot be doubted. No incident of history, whether sacred or profane, rests upon more indubitable evidence. But if so, the question remains, what is the value of such an incident? It may seem, perhaps, that its apologetic impor-

tance is inadequate to the trouble of proving its reality. To us its apologetic importance is simply vital, more vital in one sense than the celebrated Chapter (1 Cor. xv.) on the Resurrection. As we have already said, the admission of Paul's accuracy in this passage ushers us into the presence of the great witness—the Christian Founder Himself. If He uttered these words, we have got behind the Evangelists, behind the Gospels, behind the Epistles; we have come into the secret chamber where the Founder of Christianity may be heard, with his own lips, declaring the nature of his religion, and revealing his estimate of his work and mission. It is, therefore, a matter of vast importance to determine whether the words which are here undoubtedly uttered by Him are such words as we should have expected Him to utter were He the Christ of our Gospels.

Now let us observe, first of all, the manner of *this* Christ's teaching. It partakes strangely both of that manner which we find in our fourth Gospel, and of that which distinguishes the first three. The Gospel of St. John, indeed, seems from beginning to end to be absolutely based on the memory of this Last Supper. Our immediate impression in reading the Pauline narrative is that we are in the presence of a Christ of mysticism such as St. John delights to portray; and the fact that such an impression is created by so early a document is a strong refutation of the Tübingen theory that the first Christ of Christendom was a plain and practical Moralist. Yet we are equally struck by the fact of that resemblance which the Christ of St. Paul bears to the Christ of the first three Gospels. We have the same direct and abrupt utterance, seeming to come from one whose nature it is to command: "This do." What is more to the purpose, there is the same parabolic form so familiar to us in the synoptic Gospels: "This is my body for you"; "This cup is the new covenant in my

blood." The parabolic mode of speech comes to Him easily and naturally; and we feel that, if this is not the identical Christ of the Synoptists, the Synoptists must have constructed a Christ who should imitate the manner of the Pauline original.

Passing now from the manner to the matter of this utterance, we are struck with the fact that the Christian Founder is the subject of his own exhortation: "This do in remembrance of Me." We have here a reproduction in the earliest apostolic age of what our Gospels have taught us to consider an essential feature of the Master's teaching. The Christ whom we are accustomed to reverence is habitually the central figure in his own discourses: "Come unto *Me*"; "depart from *Me*"; "believe in *Me*"; "follow *Me*," are the phrases which constitute the key-notes of his teaching. The Christ of St. Paul, or rather the Christ who in St. Paul's Epistle speaks for Himself, exhibits precisely the same characteristic. He is conscious of approaching death; yet even in the act of death He feels his own personality to be that which gives vitality to his work, and that which will render his work perpetual. And let us observe here how, in the undoubted consciousness of Christ Himself, his death is recognized as the life of the world. We have pointed out in a previous Section, that the historical Christ of St. Paul was one who believed Himself to have a mission of salvation to perform, and who, through the power of his love for humanity, went forth voluntarily unto the sufferings which that mission involved. But here we have more than St. Paul's testimony; we have the direct testimony of the Christ whom he revered. The Founder of Christianity speaks in his own words, and in his own name; and we feel that for once at least we are lifted into the region of pure history. Yet the Christ who speaks here is found to be identical with the theological conception of the Epistles, and with the historical concep-

tion of the Gospels. He is, by his own admission, a Being who, through love, is prepared to die, who is ready to give his life for the world, and who asks the world in return never to let go the memory of his self-surrendering devotion. The personality revealed in these primitive words of institution contains the germ of every feature which marks the personality of the Christ of latest Christendom.

If we turn now to the claims advanced by this primitive Christ, we shall be still more surprised at the resemblance between the earliest and the latest conception. The Founder of Christianity here distinctly declares that He is Himself the originator of a covenant between God and man: "This cup is *the new covenant* in my blood." Have we seriously considered the boldness of this claim? It is far more than the simple claim to be prophet or inspired seer. The Jewish covenant was the most solemn thing in the universe, and the most fundamental fact in the universe; it was nothing less than the relation supposed to exist between the natural and the supernatural. Now imagine that in this nineteenth century a man, recognized to be of sound mind, were suddenly to stand forth and say: "I come to proclaim a new relation between the natural and the supernatural, which is to begin from this hour, and to have its first fruits in me." We shall have in that imagination a picture of the attitude in which Christ, at the Last Supper, stood to the Jewish nation. We shall be reminded, indeed, that the cases are not parallel. We shall be told that the Jews had been taught by their prophets to look for a new covenant, in other words for a new relation between the natural and the supernatural. Undoubtedly they had; but they had been taught to look for it as the result of a new order of things which should be ushered in by a reign of miracles and accompanied by a radical change in the hearts of men. It is one thing to believe in a prophecy; it is another thing

to believe that we have seen its accomplishment. If the Christian Founder had already proved his claim to be the inaugurator of a new covenant by performing deeds of miraculous power, and if that fact were admitted by those who reject our four Gospels, it would, indeed, be a waste of time to dwell upon the wonderfulness of the claim here advanced. But we are arguing with men who deny that the Founder of Christianity ever dreamed of being more than a Galilean peasant, endowed with those powers of natural common sense and those facilities of verbal expression which constitute the popular teacher. It is to such alone that we hold up the mirror of the Christ at the Last Supper. We say that, to one who believes that Christ's entire mission was to teach the Sermon on the Mount, there ought to be something very startling in the claim put forth by Him to be the origin and the ground of an altered relation between the natural and the supernatural, the cause of a new covenant between God and man. The old covenant had its historical birth in the days of Moses; but Moses never claimed to be its origin or ground or cause. His commands were issued under the formula, "Thus saith the Lord"; he never said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." The claim of the Christian Founder is unique, whatever view men may choose to take of his person. He has come to the moment of death, and He is aware of the fact; He has touched the hour of deepest human weakness, and at this hour He expresses a strength which no human potentate at the head of his armies has ever dared to claim. He declares Himself to be the new life of the world, or, which is the same thing, the life of a new world; the pouring out of his blood is to initiate a second covenant between God and man, to alter the relation between the human and the Divine. In Him all things are to be re-created; his life, in its moment of human weakness and in its hour of physical extremity, is to be the breath of a

second and a more glorious universe of whose being there shall be no end. He is Himself, through all time, to be looked back upon as the Founder of this new creation, and all the homage of its coming ages is to be concentrated in remembrance of Him.

But we have not yet exhausted the significance of this new covenant, as it appeared to the eyes of the Christian Founder. To reach the full force of the idea, we must inquire what was the old covenant. We shall find that question answered in Exodus xxiv. 8, where an account is given of its original institution. The ground of the old covenant is there said to be the sprinkling of blood. We wish to avoid here all reference to any distinctive theory of the Atonement; and, therefore, we shall keep to a statement which will be covered by all theories. The ground of the old covenant, as it was conceived by the Jews, was the offering up to Jehovah of a life which symbolized in its outward aspect the idea of sinlessness. The defectiveness of the covenant consisted in the fact that the idea of sinlessness was only symbolized, not expressed. The victim offered was not really pure; it was always tacitly implied that if a pure victim should ever be offered there would require to be a new covenant between God and man. In Isaiah lv. 3 we have the promise of an "everlasting covenant" which is to be offered to the human soul free from all conditions of legal obedience; but we learn, from Verse 5, that it is to be offered on the ground of a sinless life in Israel. If, then, any man should proclaim that he was the inaugurator of the new covenant, he would be doing neither more nor less than asserting his own sinlessness; in the eyes of the Jewish people such an act could admit of no other interpretation. Yet this is precisely the claim which is here advanced by the Christian Founder; it is not put into his mouth by way of theological interpretation; it is, in so many words,

advanced by Himself. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"; He declares his own life, on the ground of its sinlessness, to be the inauguration and the origin of an altered relation between the natural and the supernatural. We have seen, in a former Section, that the Christ whom St. Paul believed in was conceived by him to be a sinless Being; but, in the passage before us, we are put beyond all doubt that the Pauline conception was based upon a fact of history. It was based upon the fact that the Christian Founder had, in the strongest terms, claimed to be sinless, and claimed on that account the intervention of Heaven. To the mind of St. Paul, as to the mind of modern Christendom, there was present that picture which is unique in the world's history—the portrait of a Man belonging to a race of all others the most impressed with the consciousness of human depravity, and standing Himself in that immediate presence of death which is wont to lay bare the secrets of all souls; yet, in the very midst of his race and in the very presence of death, declaring Himself, by a life of unblemished sinlessness, to have bridged the chasm between the human and the Divine.

G. MATHESON.

---

*ASSYRIAN AND BABYLONIAN INSCRIPTIONS IN  
THEIR BEARING ON OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY.*

VIII. DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.

THE inscription that follows, translated by the Rev. A. H. Sayce from a tablet on which it is found both in Accadian and Assyrian, presents, it will be admitted, a degree of parallelism with the history of Genesis xix. sufficient to excite interest and curiosity. In its fragmentary state, making no mention of the names of the cities whose overthrow it records, it would perhaps be premature to affirm that it is