

sense, a nation to which was entrusted as its special mission to preserve and hand on the knowledge of the one God,—can we wonder that Israel should have hated its foreign foes so bitterly and cursed them so passionately, when eighteen hundred years of Christian light have not been able to put an end to war, or taught men that international jealousies and hatreds are as sinful and foolish as the enmity and rancour of individuals?

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### THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

#### VIII. ST. PAUL'S GOSPEL.

##### *Chapter iii. 4-7.*

INTO this single sentence, St. Paul, no longer a young man, has compressed the main outlines of that Gospel, to proclaim which had been the business of his manhood. The verses might almost be adopted by any one in search of a creed as a summary, no less authoritative than convenient, of the Pauline or "evangelical" system of doctrine. There is no point of faith touched in this statement which does not receive an ample discussion in one or other of St. Paul's Epistles. There are indeed fundamental doctrines of the faith, such as the Trinity or the Divinity of our Lord, which are here implied rather than expressly taught. But for a succinct statement, at once comprehensive and precise, of what St. Paul and the whole New Testament teach on what is properly termed "the Gospel," that is, God's way of saving sinful men, I hardly know where we shall turn to find a better.

It is plain that within the limits of a short paper my exposition of such a passage can be nothing more than a sketch. The truths to be passed in review are numerous; they are all vital, and at another time would all deserve the

fullest treatment. What has now to be attempted is to review them rapidly, noting how vital to Christian faith they really are, and at the same time how they come to be expressed in the form which they wear in this passage, as the one best adapted to the design of the writer and the situation of his correspondents.

It may assist the reader to find his way over so wide a field if he will note at the outset two points. First, the central words, on which as on a peg the whole structure both of thought and of expression hangs, is the proposition—"He saved us." Alike in grammar and in theology, this is the key to the whole. It is a statement in the historical sense, because the good news is a record of past activity on the part of God on man's behalf. The design of that Divine activity is our salvation; and our comprehension of the steps which lead to that end, must depend upon our doing entire justice to the great Christian thought contained in the technical term *salvation*. In what sense is man lost? In what must his salvation consist? What is necessary in order to it? In proportion as these questions are answered in a profound or in a shallow way, will be our appreciation of those redemptive actions of God—the mission of his Son and the outpouring of his Spirit.

Next, let it be noted that in this saving of man by God three leading points have to be attended to: The source or origin of it; the method of it; the issues and effects of it. If these three are kept well in mind, that all the details of the Gospel plan may be grouped under them, it will conduce to an intelligent reading of this passage. What we have to ask from St. Paul is a distinct reply to these three great queries: (1) From what source did God's saving activity on our behalf take its rise? (2) Through what methods does it operate upon us? (3) To what ultimate issues does it conduct those who are its objects?

I. The answer to the first of these need not detain us

long. True, it is a point of primary importance for the immediate purpose of the writer in the present connection. What he is engaged in enforcing upon Cretan Christians is, a meek and gentle deportment toward their heathen neighbours. With this design, it is most pertinent to observe that they have not themselves to thank for being in a better state than others—saved Christians instead of lost heathen; not themselves, but God's gratuitous kindness. It is worth remarking too in this connection, how singularly human are the terms selected to express the saving love of God. Two terms are used. The one is God's "kindliness" or sweet benignity, like that gentle friendliness which one helpful neighbour may shew to another in distress. The other is God's "love for man," literally, his philanthropy, or such special benevolence to all who wear the human form as might be looked for indeed among the members of our race themselves, but which it startles one to find is shared in by Him who made us. These curiously human phrases are chosen, it is to be presumed, because St. Paul would have us imitate in our dealings with one another God's behaviour toward us. In substance, however, they describe just the same merciful and compassionate love in God our Saviour, to which the whole New Testament traces back man's salvation as to its prime or fontal source. That the originating impulse to undertake the work of his salvation has not to be sought in man himself, but, outside of man's deserts, solely in God, in the spontaneous sovereign goodness of the Divine nature, is the very first of all evangelical truths. On this point, to start with, Christian consciousness has been in unanimous accord with the witness of Scripture. And this ultimate reference to the free self-moving love of God, is a truth fruitful in its influence upon Christian experience. It strips man of credit to robe God in glory. It humbles our self-conceit to make us debtors to free grace. It de-

livers us from painful efforts at saving ourselves, by putting into the empty hand of humble sinners as a gift, what the best of men could never win as a prize. Hope was born for the guilty and evil, when, like a dawn, there shone forth at the coming of the Christ that kindness towards his fallen creatures, which had lain long hidden within the heart of God. For the manifestation or epiphany of that kindness to man was (as this Epistle has already taught us) the advent of the Son of God as our incarnate Saviour.

It is quite in harmony with this ascription of our salvation to God's love as its fountain-head, that, throughout his account of the process, Paul continues to make God the subject of his sentence, and man its object. All along the line, God appears as active and we as receptive; He is the doer or giver, man the field of his operations and the recipient of his benefits. No doubt there is another side to the great process, viewed as a human experience. There are states of repentance, of faith, of obedience, and of perseverance, in which a man is not simply passive, but co-operant with the Divine Worker. There is such a thing as letting oneself be reconciled to God; such a thing as not receiving the grace of God in vain; such a thing as giving diligence to work out one's own salvation. Nor are the apostolic writers slow to insist on the responsibility of every man for the performance of those duties which spring out of the call of the Gospel, however slow they may be to attempt—what theology has found impossible—a speculative reconciliation betwixt the human and Divine factors. Here, however, the tenor of St. Paul's argument leads him to view the saving process from the Divine side. In the light of all Scripture as well as of all experience, it stands fast that, from its inception right on to its accomplishment, the praise of our salvation must be ascribed, not at all to us who through grace receive it, but wholly to Him whose love devised and whose grace confers it.

II. We pass next from the epiphany of God's unmerited kindness in the advent of the Saviour, to that process by which individuals, at Crete or elsewhere, become partakers in his salvation.

The conversion of one born a heathen wears a conspicuous character, which is usually wanting to cases of conversion among ourselves. It is true that the spiritual elements of the change are alike in both. In both there occur a quickening of the conscience to feel the evil and guilt of the sinful past in God's sight, a turning of the moral nature to desire entire purity, and the setting in of a new drift of the man in his whole being towards God and the unseen. In both alike, the religious nature seems to awaken to fresh truths; in both the spiritual faculty of faith finds for the first time its legitimate object; in both the tidings of the Divine love forgiving sin exerts the same charm, dispelling fear and dislike, begetting confidence in God, inspiring hope for the future, calming or soothing the spirit, and imparting to the active forces of the will a nobler impulse than before. All this will be found to take place below the surface in the nominal Christian when he begins to be a Christian indeed, no less than in the heathen convert who presents himself for baptism. Yet in the former case, such a change may pass unrecognized by onlookers. It may neither reveal itself in any apparent alteration of outward conduct, nor be registered by any ecclesiastical act of profession. Not so with such men as Paul was addressing in Crete. The day of their baptism, on which they sealed their conversion to the Christian faith, had marked a complete revolution in every department of their life. It had in many cases severed family ties. It had in all cases made them marked men in society. It had brought them into the circle of a strange community, and affiliated them to new comrades under the badges of a foreign religion. Outwardly, no less than inwardly, they were become new

creatures; the old had passed away and all things were become new. The font at which they sealed their vows of discipleship had proved to be a second birth—the starting point for a changed life.

Of course it is still the same among the converts who are won at our mission stations abroad; and we require to keep the condition of an infant missionary church well in mind if we would do justice to such language as St. Paul has here employed to describe the conversion of his readers. He speaks of the change in phrases borrowed both from its outer and inner side, its ritual and its spiritual elements. Inwardly, the convert was saved by the power of the Holy Spirit regenerating and renewing him. Outwardly, this spiritual second birth found its expressive seal in the bath or laver of holy baptism. But in St. Paul's vivid language these two, the spiritual fact and its ritual expression, run together into one, in a way which has perplexed or misled many theologians. The chances are that St. Paul felt no necessity to keep them very sharply apart, even in his own mind. In the experience and recollection of his readers, the two were fused together, and he was free to use the language of rhetoric with no dread of a logical misapprehension. Not fearing lest any one should suspect him of seeing some magical or transforming virtue in a bath of water, Paul could talk quite naturally, and without misgiving, of the laver of the new birth as well as of renewal by the Spirit of God. The truth is that the figment of regeneration through the mere rite of water baptism, as it strangely developed itself in later times, after the poetry and symbolism of Christianity had stiffened into grotesque shapes of dogma, could scarcely have found its way into men's minds at all but for their long familiarity with the baptism of infants. So long as we associate the administration of the rite only or mainly with converted adults, it is abundantly evident that the catechumen must be a convert before he is

baptized. That is to say, the spiritual change must precede the rite, not be produced by it. The man needs, it is clear, to have turned from his idols, to have believed in Jesus Christ, to have washed his soul in the blood of expiation, to have received the new heart by the Holy Ghost, to have become, in a word, a new man and a child of God before he is prepared to submit to the ceremony of a formal initiation into Christ's society. How could it ever be dreamt that all this was a mysterious consequence of that ceremony?

Paul's language, therefore, could not mislead his Cretan readers. But it was admirably adapted to revive their most touching recollections. As they read his words, each one of them seemed to himself to stand once more, as on the most memorable and solemn day of his life, beside the sacred font. Once more he saw himself descend into the laver to symbolize the cleansing of his conscience from idol worship, from unbridled indulgence, from a vain conversation, by the precious death and burial of his Lord. By that act how utterly had he broken once for all with his earlier life and its polluted associations, leaving them behind him like a buried past! Coming up afresh to commence the new pure career of a Christian disciple, he had received the symbolic white robe amid the congratulations of the brotherhood, who thronged around to welcome the new-born with a kiss of love—to welcome him among that little band who, beneath the cross, had sworn to fight the devil in Jesus' strength, and, if need arose, to shed their blood for Jesus' name! How keenly, as all this rushed back upon the Christian's recollection, must he have felt that a change so wonderful and blessed was the Lord's doing. What power, save God's, could have turned backward the currents of his being, reversing the influences of education with the traditions of his ancestry and the usages of his fatherland? What hand, but the Almighty's, could have snatched him out of the doomed nations over which Satan reigned,

to translate him into that kingdom of light—the kingdom of God's dear Son? Where was the spiritual force that could have opened his eyes, cleansed his conscience, quickened his heart, and made a new man out of the old one, save that Divine Spirit whose advent at Pentecost had been the birthday of a new era for the human family? The grateful praise which could not fail to mount to the lips at such a recollection, was a doxology to the Triune God, into whose Name he had been baptized: to the Father unseen, eternal fountain head of mercy; to the Incarnate Son, sole channel for its manifestation to guilty men; to the Holy Ghost, who, like a stream of life, had been plentifully poured forth from the Father, through the Son, to be the effectual giver of life in sinful souls!

If the modern Christian, cradled and nursed within the Church, cannot recall, with equal clearness, the day of his new birth, or surround it with the same picturesque pageantry of holy rites, or date from it a fresh departure so unmistakable as theirs had been, he may be equally aware that a Divine Saviour has come near, and that the quickening breath of God has been about him with quiet and patient influence ever since he can remember. He too may know that he is not to-day what he once was, but better; less bent on pleasing himself, less irritable when provoked, less greedy of secular gain, less proud of his own virtue, less censorious to his neighbour's faults, less forgetful of his duties to God. To him also has his early dedication to Christ's service at the font proved to be a pledge of his baptism in the Holy Ghost, and of a renewal of nature not a whit less wonderful because it has been more gradual and gentle.

III. Consider, in the last place, whither this saving activity on the part of the Godhead is carrying such as surrender themselves to it. What is to be the outcome of his redemptive undertaking? In this alone, that the sinner is



justified freely by his grace? Is the release of the guilty from condemnation and penalty the issue of all that God has done in his kindness? No; but that, "having been justified, we should be made heirs." Acquittal is a splendid boon, and forgiveness is sweet. The peace of reconciliation to the Holy One is like a paradise restored to penitent souls. Yet the generosity of God has in reserve a nobler blessing. He calls us his sons. It is part of the good news, as St. Paul taught it, that the filial standing of saved men in the divine family is a result of their new birth of the Holy Ghost, and that sonship to God involves likewise a share in the divine life and glory as our everlasting inheritance. The successive steps by which this great theologian reaches that word "heirs" in the seventh verse are easy to trace by the help of other passages in his writings. The conversion of the Cretan believers has been described as their second birth. Birth of the Divine Spirit involves sonship to God Himself. The privilege of sons is to inherit; "heirs," therefore, of "life eternal."

The word is one which opens, as it were, a door into heaven. It is true that it is not yet apparent what the children of God shall hereafter be, for purity, for freedom, for wisdom, for felicity. But forth from that opened door, how there streams to meet us a radiance of the unseen glory, which in the twilight of this life-time dazzles our earthly eyes! For that undiscovered heritage of the saints in light, we can only hope. To this point, therefore, and no further, does the Christian Gospel conduct its disciple. Here for the present it leaves him, sitting patient and expectant by the gate of Paradise, to await, with steadfast heart, the moment that shall disclose to him his patrimony of bliss. While he sits and waits, shall he not behave himself as a child of God, and strive to grow more meet for the heritage of the holy?

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