

*CHRIST CRUCIFIED AND RISEN.*

In a former paper I endeavoured to expound the meaning St. Paul intended to convey by a remarkable group of phrases in which he represents the death and resurrection of Christ as reproduced in His servants. My aim now is to reach in some measure the conceptions of the death and resurrection of Christ and of their relation to the salvation of men which underlay, and prompted, these phrases; or, in other words, to elucidate their bearing on the doctrine of the Atonement.

We shall thus pursue the best method and order of theological research. For our only reliable sources of knowledge of the gospel preached by Christ are the extant writings of His early followers. And these we shall best use as windows through which to look into each writer's mind in order to read there his conception of Christ and the gospel. A further stage of inquiry is to compare these various conceptions, in order thus to form a conception of our own, as full and correct as possible, of the Nature and Work of the Son of God.

It is impossible to doubt that the phrases *crucified* and *dead with Christ* refer to the actual and historic death of Christ upon the cross. This reference is very clear in Romans vi. 9, *Knowing that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more: of Him death is no longer lord*; a passage referring indisputably to historical facts. For these facts are quoted to explain verse 8, *If we died with Christ*: and the significance of the facts is explained by the words following, *In that He died, He died to sin once*. Similarly, in Galatians vi. 14 *the cross* in which St. Paul gloried can be no other than the timber on which He died. Yet we are told that by means of that cross the world had been crucified to St. Paul and he to the world. This reference

to historic fact is confirmed by many other passages in the group before us.

Looking now at the group of passages from this point of view, we see at once that the historic fact of Christ's death occupied in the mind of St. Paul a position absolutely unique, one never occupied, so far as the literature of the world testifies, by the death of any other person who ever lived and died on earth. Evidently St. Paul believed that his salvation and that of all Christians comes through the death of Christ upon the cross, that they live and will for ever live because He died, that had He not died no life eternal would now await them. It is equally certain that the Apostle believed that this good result was not accidental, but was designed by Christ Himself, and by the Father, who sent His Son into the world. This last point finds conspicuous expression in 2 Corinthians v. 15, *He died . . . that they may live for Him who on their behalf died and rose*. And it underlies his entire teaching about the death of Christ.

The same belief underlies also other phraseology frequent throughout the letters of St. Paul. If Christ died of His own free choice in order to save men from sin and death, a salvation otherwise impossible, then were His death and blood the ransom-price of our life; and the words *redemption* and *bought-off*<sup>1</sup> are explained and justified. For, any costly means used to attain an end not otherwise possible, we speak of as a price paid for it. In the same way, the word *propitiation* used to describe the purpose and result of the death of Christ finds adequate explanation. For if Christ saves us from death, the penalty of sin, by Himself dying, then His death shelters the head of the sinner from the punishment due to His sin; the exact meaning in the Old Testament of the common Hebrew word whose Greek equivalent is in the New Testament rendered *propitiation*.

<sup>1</sup> As in Gal. iii. 13, iv. 5; 1 Cor. vii. 23.

Moreover, in addition to the group of phrases discussed in my last paper, and the two words just mentioned, the Epistles of St. Paul are full of categorical statements that our salvation comes through the death and blood of Christ, and that for this end He died. A galaxy of such plain assertions shines upon us in Romans v. 6-10: *Christ . . . died on behalf of ungodly men, died on our behalf, justified in His blood, reconciled to God through the death of His Son.* All this places beyond a shadow of doubt, as matter of fact, that St. Paul believed and taught that the historic death of Christ upon the cross is the means of our salvation, and that for this end He died. This assured fact, mental and yet in some sense historic, demands explanation.

The urgency of this demand is increased by other facts. The belief underlying the phraseology peculiar to St. Paul underlies also other forms of speech found in the Fourth Gospel and the First Epistle of John, documents very different in thought and expression from the writings of the Apostle to the Gentiles. For instance, in 1 John i. 7 we read, *The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.* This can only mean that through the death of Christ comes deliverance from the defilement of sin. Christ is represented in John x. 11, 15, as twice saying that *the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*; and His words are re-echoed in 1 John iii. 16: *He laid down His life on our behalf.* Very remarkable are the words of Christ recorded in John xii. 24: *Except the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone; but if it die, it bears much fruit.* Language equally clear and strong proves that the writers of the Synoptist Gospels gave to the death of Christ the same significance. So, in Matthew xx. 28, we read, *The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many*; and in chap. xxvi. 28, *The blood of the covenant which is being poured out for the forgiveness of sins.* All this proves most clearly that not only St. Paul but the early followers

of Christ generally, men differing most widely in their modes of apprehending the gospel, agree in a firm belief that the salvation He proclaimed comes through His death, and that this was taught by Christ Himself.

This united belief, which is attested as an historic fact, by copious and trustworthy evidence, demands explanation. We naturally ask, Whence came it? and How did it gain the firm and deep root revealed by the abundant and various outgrowth of expression?

This fertile conception cannot have been derived from the animal sacrifices which held so important a place in the Old Covenant. For the ideas of sacrifice enter only into a small part of the teaching of the New Testament about salvation through the death of Christ. And they are altogether alien from the group of passages discussed in my last paper. All this proves that the teaching before us rests upon a foundation far broader and deeper than the Jewish sacrifices.

The only possible explanation of the whole case is that the early followers of Christ were correct in their belief that the doctrine they held so firmly was taught by their Master; that He actually taught that through His death salvation would come to men, and that for this end He was about to die. Assume this, and the language attributed to Christ in the Gospels is explained by the fact that He actually spoke the words attributed to Him; as is the language about His death in the Epistles of St. Paul, St. John, and St. Peter. Deny this, and one of the most conspicuous and distinctive elements of New Testament teaching becomes an historical enigma which no one can solve.

An important question now meets us: How comes it that the death of Christ is needful for man's salvation? Upon this necessity light is cast by the teaching frequent throughout the New Testament, that Christ died for our sins: Romans iv. 25; 1 Corinthians xv. 3; Galatians i. 4;

1 Peter ii. 24, iii. 18 ; 1 John ii. 2 ; Matthew xxvi. 28. For this implies that the need for so costly a means of salvation lay in our sins.

This answer prompts at once another most important question. Why is it that man's sin made the death of Christ needful for his salvation ? An answer to this further question is suggested by Romans vii. 4, perhaps the most significant phrase in the group before us : *Ye were put to death to the Law by means of the body of Christ. The body of Christ* can be no other than the sacred flesh nailed to the cross. And the connexion proves that in St. Paul's view the Law of God presented an obstacle to the sinner's reception into His favour, just as the law of matrimony forbids a woman to marry again while her husband lives ; and that this obstacle was removed by the death of Christ upon the cross. A similar phrase involving similar teaching is found in Galatians ii. 19 : *Through law I died to law.*

These passages are in close harmony with the very many passages connecting the death of Christ with man's sin. For *sin is lawlessness* : 1 John iii. 4.

Teaching practically the same is found in Romans iii. 25, 26 : *Whom God set forth as a propitiation, through faith, in His blood, . . . that He might be Himself just and a justifier of him that is of faith in Jesus.* This implies that, apart from the death of Christ, to justify a sinner would be unjust, and therefore impossible to God ; or, in other words, that the justice of God made salvation impossible except through the death of Christ. And, if so, St. Paul could correctly say that through the crucified body of Christ we were put to death to the Law. For apart from the death of Christ we should be still under its condemnation, whereas we are now as completely free from it as is a dead man from the ills of life. Moreover, since God gave Christ to die in order to pardon sinners without infringing His own Law, the death of Christ itself was a tribute to the inviolability of

the Law; and St. Paul could rightly say, *through law I died to law.*

It is impossible to explain Romans iii. 26 as meaning that God gave Christ to die in order to show to men that to pardon those who believe in Christ is not inconsistent with the justice of God. For, if justice did not in itself present a hindrance to the pardon of believers, surely it was not needful for Christ to die in order to make this known to men. In that case, certainly the Spirit of God, the Revealer of all mysteries, could have made manifest the real justice underlying apparent injustice. Moreover, that this is not the correct exposition of Romans iii. 26 is, as we have just seen, made quite clear by chap. vii. 4. For the Law is an embodiment of the justice of God. Consequently, if the death of Christ removed an obstacle to pardon presented by the Law of God, it removed an obstacle presented by His justice. Thus each of these passages supports that interpretation of the other which is most naturally suggested by the words used.

Thus far does St. Paul guide us in our endeavour to understand the relation between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of man's sin. He declares plainly again and again that salvation comes through the death of Christ, that the need for this costly means of salvation lay in man's sin, and that the impossibility of forgiving sin except through the death of Christ has its root in God Himself, in His attribute of justice.

It is now evident that the doctrine of the Atonement is not, as many say, an invention of theologians, resting only upon creeds, but is an attempt to explain an important element in the teaching of St. Paul and St. John and almost all the writers of the New Testament, an element of teaching which must have come from the lips of Christ; and an effort to reach the principles underlying it. If the doctrine as stated above be true, the language in the New

Testament about the death of Christ is explained. Unless it be true, this language is meaningless.

Accepting now as true St. Paul's teaching that the need of Christ's death for man's salvation lay in the justice of God, of which the Law is an historic embodiment, it is the difficult task of the theologian to explain this necessity. But this task lies beyond my present scope.

It is however worthy of remark that, even in human governments, to pardon the guilty by mere prerogative tends to overturn all law and overturn social order. To administer strict justice by punishment of the guilty, is for the highest welfare of the State, and is therefore on the part of a ruler the greatest kindness. Now human government is a Divine institution, and must therefore be in some points analogous to the Divine government. This being so, it is not difficult to believe that the justice of God which requires the punishment of the guilty is but one side of His love which seeks ever the highest good of His creatures. If then to pardon by mere prerogative be injurious to our race as a whole, the love of God, seeking ever the highest good of all, would present an obstacle to such forgiveness.

How the death of Christ removes this obstacle, is a question most difficult. In human government, such substitution would never be allowed. Nor would it serve the ends of justice. But we notice that the relation of Christ to the human race differs absolutely and infinitely from that of any one man to any other. The Innocent One who dies that the guilty may live, not only Himself gave life to the race, but is the Judge who condemns the guilty. And, before taking upon Himself the punishment due to us, he joined Himself to the guilty race by ties which made Him one with them, robing Himself in the bodily form which bore the curse of man's sin. Perhaps we may reverently say that He joined Himself to the guilty so closely that the punishment due to them fell upon Him who alone

could bear it without absolute and hopeless ruin, in order that just as by contact with them He shares their death so they might by contact with Him who is essential life become themselves immortal. In other words, embracing in His arms those under the burden and curse of sin, He sank with them into the grave, in order that, rising from the grave, He might raise them also. That justice took its course, even though in its course it smote the Son of God, who had united Himself to those whom justice condemned, reveals in some measure the inevitable sequence of sin and punishment. To keep this sequence before the eyes of his subjects is the aim of every just ruler.

But, whatever becomes of these poor attempts to explain it, there remains the historic fact that Christ taught that His death was needful for the pardon of the guilty. This teaching occupies so large a place in the New Testament that to deny it is to surrender one of the most distinctive features of the gospel.

That St. Paul believed without a shadow of doubt that Christ actually rose from the dead, is abundantly proved by his many plain assertions. The importance of this fact in his view is proved by his making it the ground of our faith in Christ: 1 Corinthians xv. 14-17, Romans i. 4, and a great multitude of passages. But even this abundant proof is confirmed by his remarkable teaching that believers are risen with Christ, and that the power which raised Him from the grave is already at work in them, breathing into them a new spiritual life, like that of the Risen Saviour. For a mental growth so abundant and strong and lofty proves how deeply and firmly rooted was the conception from which it sprang, namely, the historic reality of the resurrection of Christ.

To sum up the results of our study. We have seen that the group of passages which has occupied our attention, a group unique in the religious teaching of the world and



even in that of the New Testament, can be explained only as an outgrowth of a deep conviction that man's salvation comes through the death of Christ; and of a conviction that His death removed an obstacle to salvation resting upon the Law and Justice of God. Thus the passages we have studied confirm the teaching of many others in the New Testament connecting man's salvation with the death of Christ. They also prove that the teaching of the New Testament about the death of Christ cannot be accounted for by the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant. For with the ideas of sacrifice this group of passages has nothing to do. A neglected element of St. Paul's teaching thus renders important confirmation to an all-important doctrine in all ages held firmly by the Universal Church of God.

In the same teaching we have also found additional proof of St. Paul's firm conviction that Christ actually rose from the dead, a conviction moulding his entire conception of the new life won by Christ for men.

This interesting subject I commend to many who look upon the doctrine of the Atonement as a matter of mere creed and dogma, or of orthodox misrepresentation; and to very many others who glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, because to them on that cross the world has been crucified and they crucified to the world.

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