

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

III.

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE SPIRIT.¹

THE Christian life, as conceived by St. Paul, is founded upon the forgiveness of sin. From condemnation and enmity against God to justification or peace with God is a step across an impassable gulf: we cannot make it nor attempt it; but God's redemptive love and power has accomplished it for us. Our part there is the passive one of faith. Once this step is taken, our feet are planted on the road to salvation; the remainder of our way is traversed under the assured protection of the God who has begun and will complete His work. "Faithful is He that called you, who will also accomplish." "Who shall separate us from Christ's love?"

I.

But is our warfare already accomplished now that our iniquity is pardoned? Is our life to be a primrose path to heaven? and have we an amnesty prospective as well as retrospective? What is the new life to be? What and whence are its obligations?

St. Paul answers this question in vi.-viii. And first, assuming that by baptism we are united not only with Christ, but specifically with His death, he draws out the moral demand which is thus involved, viz., a death to sin, the death of our old self, the destruction of the power of sin over the body. Our old self is dead; a new self takes

¹ Since the following pages were written, Canon Gore's Lectures on the Epistle have appeared. I have decided to abstain from any discussion of his views on this portion of the Epistle, but am glad to find my views on fundamental points in substantial agreement with Mr. Gore's.

its place, animated by a new vital energy, *καινότης ζωῆς*, which is to be the sphere of a wholly new course of conduct. As death no longer wields power over the risen Christ, so sin will no longer wield power over us; the sharp moral summons of vi. 12-14 is not a repetition of the old and morally inoperative commands of law; it is a summons that will take effect; for law is gone and a transforming influence has come in its place. "Sin will not lord it over you, for ye are *not under law*, but under grace."

This is a hard saying, a paradox, and has for long stretches of time been tacitly set aside in church teaching. The A.V. dilutes it by the article "*the Law*," as though St. Paul referred merely to the supersession of the Mosaic Law, not to that of Law as such. But this dilution sacrifices all that is characteristic of St. Paul's meaning. The writer to the Hebrews has been far more readily understood by Churchmen in his treatment of the Law than has St. Paul. The Epistle to the Hebrews treats of the abrogation of the Jewish Law in respect of its content; St. Paul in respect of its character *as Law*; in Hebrews, it is the evanescence of the *ceremonial* Law that is insisted on; in Romans, Law is considered as a factor in the *moral* life, and as such is pronounced to have ended in Christ: *τέλος νόμου Χριστός*—"Christ is an end of Law unto righteousness to whosoever believeth." This is the paradox. For does not an end of "Law-as-such" mean a dissolution of moral obligation? That such a misconception was very natural, we see from the closely following question, *ἀμαρτήσωμεν ὅτι οὐκ ἔσμεν ὑπὸ νόμον, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ χάριν*; St. Paul's answer is not, in the first instance, an explanation of his paradox. He tells us not what he means, but what he does not mean. I do not stop to analyse more fully than I did in the first paper of this series the passage vi. 15-end.¹ But at the cost of

¹ See EXPOSITOR for January, 1899.

using a conception which he really regards as lowering and unworthy, he makes his meaning clear even to the dullest spiritual apprehension. By renouncing the slavery of sin you *ipso facto* became *slaves* to righteousness, slaves to God. St. Paul leaves us in no doubt or confusion on this most vital point. The obedience of the Christian to God is as absolute as that of the slave—the mere living implement—to his master. Then in a condensed passage (vii. 1-4), where the *subsidiary* illustration of marriage dissolved by death infiltrates into the *main* simile of death as removing a man from the jurisdiction of law [the idea of marriage to the law, or, still more, that of marriage to the old self, is, I venture to say, quite alien to the context], St. Paul insists that to the Christian death to law, and therefore to sin, is a fact involved in union with the death of Christ. The pregnant contrast between the old state and the new (vv. 5, 6) maps out the course of the coming analysis or psychology of the Christian life (vii. 7-viii.).

II.

Here we pause to consider the great paradox. Is it really true of a Christian man that he is not under Law, but under Grace? What is meant by Law here? In a sense, St. Paul speaks of himself as under a Law—*μὴ ὄν ἄνομος θεοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ* (1 Cor. ix. 21). The determinant moral motive power of the Christian life is *ὁ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς*. But law in this sense is not law regarded as a code, not law regarded as an injunction imposed from without. It is an acquired or implanted instinct of obedience, engraved upon the heart, working from within, identified with the personality of the spiritual man. He obeys because he has learned, as Augustine learned, from the psalmist, “*bonum est mihi adhaerere Deo.*” The slave obeys blindly, because he is ordered; the son, the friend, enters into his father's or his

sovereign's Ends, and pursues them as his own. "Henceforth I call you not slaves, but friends; for the slave knoweth not what his master doeth."

Well, then, understand Law in its literal sense, as a body of commands simply imposed, not in its adapted sense, as a principle of action which has become assimilated as part of oneself—and in that sense St. Paul meant what he said when he tells the Christian that he is not under Law, but under Grace.

Well, then, is it true of us Christians? Yes,—and no! Ideally, yes; in practice, alas, hardly. If we are Christians as we ought to be, yes. But what are we? To many of us who bear the Christian name always—to every Christian surely, in his lower moments—it might be said with more truth, "Ye are not under Grace, but under Law." Yet the free life of grace is the ideal; the servile, graceless, reluctant bondage of law the slough of despond, in which we may still be, but in which we are forbidden to acquiesce. To live the Christian life is to be under Grace; to be under Law is to fall short, and to fail. The principle is very far-reaching in its application; it touches all departments of Christian life and practice. To take one instance in passing. The institutions of the catholic Church, her laws, her definitions, her authority—all these things are ours. They are God's gifts, and our glorious heritage! They are comprised in God's grace. Ideally they are to be accepted by us freely as such; practically they assume the character of Law, imposed upon us by sanction and authority. Man's nature being what it is, this is inevitable; and there are many who are content to receive them simply in this way. But let us not forget that this falls short of the ideal, for here, too, the axiom holds good: "Ye are not under law but under grace." This consideration will not tempt us to despise or reject these gifts of God, but it will teach us a new attitude toward them. They are ours; not we

theirs. "All things are ours . . . but we Christ's, and Christ God's."

I say, then, that this is an *ideal* truth that St. Paul lays down, but one that in practice is too apt to be not true, because of the infirmity of our flesh. And in reading the next section, where, employing, as I have said, a method of difference, St. Paul considers the life of man under law, in order that he may bring out by contrast the characteristics of the new life of the Spirit and of grace, what I have tried to point out will remove the embarrassing pressure of an ancient controversy. We are asked, Can chapter vii. 7-25 be regarded *simply* as a description of man viewed as unregenerate? Is not the gloomy picture of inner conflict ending in failure and subjection to sin too truly characteristic of the experience of the Christian? The answer is this: The state described in this chapter is true of the Christian just exactly in so far as St. Paul's great paradox fails in his case to hold good. It describes man under law, not man under grace. So far as we *are* still *ὑπὸ νόμον*, still *ἐν τῇ σαρκί*, still *ἐν παλαιότητι γράμματος*, still not "dead to that wherein we were held"—so far we are described by vii. 7-25. But in that description the dominant force of the Christian life, *the Spirit*, is conspicuously absent; to take vii. 7-25 of the typical Christian life, is to fix upon St. Paul a craven ideal of that life, which he defies in the triumphant cry of victory, *ἁμαρτία ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον, ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν*.

III.

In chapter viii., then, St. Paul dismisses the dominant moral factor conspicuous in vii. 7-25—the Law, and replaces the factor he had temporarily withdrawn—the indwelling Christ, the Spirit; and now again, and at last, we see the Righteousness of Faith at work. Now, accordingly, he dismisses the idea of slavery in favour of the true

secret of Christian obedience, that of sonship. "Ye received the Spirit"—that he appeals to as a fact of his readers' experience. "Well, then, in receiving the Spirit, you received not a spirit of timorous, retrogressive slavery, but one of adoption." You are "not in flesh, but in spirit," "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of Christ," "dwells in you," "you are Christ's," "Christ is in you," "the Spirit of God is in you"—all variant phrases descriptive of the indwelling of Christ, identical with the indwelling of the Spirit.

I cut short what I should have wished to say of the difficult and weighty opening paragraphs of this chapter; I omit a discussion of its second part—the sublime survey of the Christian life reproducing and carrying to the higher plane he has now reached the simpler but not less sublime thought of v. 1-11,—in order to put together briefly St. Paul's doctrine of the Spirit as the dominant factor of the Christian life and of the spiritual man.

The use of the word *πνεῦμα* in St. Paul is notoriously difficult. There is, firstly, what may be called its purely *theological* sense, of the Holy Spirit—*τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον*, *τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ*, as in the Apostolic Benediction (2 Cor. xiii. 14), and in Romans viii. 11-26 sqq. (*τὸ πνεῦμα*). The chief difficulty here belongs rather to other epistles than to Romans, viz., the apparent identification of the Spirit with Christ. The main passage is, of course, 2 Corinthians iii. 17, 18. The keynote struck there is strongly persistent in language¹ which meets us in the Church down to the end of the 4th century. With our minds cleared by the dogmatic decisions of the Church's councils, this language is most startling; all I will remark is that the strong tendency to identify the (pre-existent or the) glorified Christ with the Spirit is too contrary to the plain distinction

¹ Vid. Swete in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, 114, 115 et passim, s.v. Holy Ghost.

between the two Holy Persons in the Godhead in other passages of the New Testament, and the Church's general mind from the first, to have arisen without some strong cause. That cause is this: that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was given at first not as an abstract doctrine, but as a fact in experience. The indwelling Christ and the indwelling Spirit *were* one fact, one thing, and, as we have seen, are spoken of by St. Paul convertibly. Beginning from a formulated theology of the Holy Trinity, the two could never be confused; but beginning from the facts of Christian experience, they were but slowly distinguished.

Then there is the purely psychological sense of *πνεῦμα*, designating an universal and natural element in the constitution of man. This use is not frequent, but its existence is important. (See 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. vii. 1). In this sense it merges into the idea of *ψυχή*, and is closely associated with *νοῦς*—still more so with *ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος*. It seems to correspond to our ordinary use of the word "soul" (and a frequent use of "spirit"), denoting the seat of personality, that which constitutes individuality, which at once needs, and is susceptible of "salvation," or, under another aspect, that which distinguishes the man from the animal—the *ψυχή λογική* of later orthodox theology. 1 Thessalonians v. 23 is, I think, too hastily used as expressing a trichotomous psychology, such as Apollinarius afterwards applied to the doctrine of the Incarnation.

In this sense of *πνεῦμα*, man as such is spiritual, even the unspiritual man is a spiritual being.

There remains the sense in which *πνεῦμα* is distinctive of the spiritual man as contrasted with the carnal, *ψυχικός* or *σαρκικός*. This lies between the psychological and the theological use of the word, and connects the two. It is the most difficult use of the word. First, as compared with the purely psychological. The latter denotes rather a capacity than a state of man. Every man is in his

personality spiritual, or else he would be incapable of responding to the inward influence of the Spirit of God; but his spiritual character is potential, latent, ineffective. Only contact with the Holy Spirit of God develops this potency into active reality. When, and in proportion as, this is the case, man becomes spiritual in the true sense, only then can his spiritual nature assert and exercise its natural supremacy over will and action; only then is the *ἔσω ἄνθρωπος* renewed, the assent of the intellect to God's law transformed into the energy of holy *will*, good *intention* made effective—*καὶ τὸ θέλει καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν*: only then is man no longer under Law, but under Grace.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit—the work of God in man, the fruit of the indwelling Christ. But it consists not in the addition of a new something to the constitution of the soul, but in the invigoration, the calling out into life and action, of what God had created in man as a constituent of his being. When Paul purposed *ἐν τῷ πνεύματι* to do this or that, what is meant is that he purposed in *his* spirit, but his spirit is the vehicle of the Spirit of God. To walk in the Spirit is to live in the highest capacity of our nature; but that highest capacity is but a shadow of a name apart from the indwelling Christ, apart from “the Lord the Spirit.” So that in Romans viii. the regenerate spirit of man and the inhabiting Spirit of God are spoken of in one breath again and again, as though they were one and the same (viii. 9, 15, 16, etc.), and yet the separate existence (viii. 2, 4), the Personality (viii. 26 sqq.) of the Divine Spirit makes itself felt through the whole passage from beginning to end. Union with Christ is a fact founded upon faith, or on baptism the concrete act of faith; but *conscious* union with Christ is the work of the Spirit. Conscious union with Christ the Son of God brings with it the reality and the consciousness of sonship on our part. The Spirit in us cries *Ἀββᾶ ὁ πατήρ*.

IV.

The Filial Spirit is, firstly, the spring of *obedience*. Transformed from within, the outward life is changed; the Christian obeys with the absolute submissiveness of a slave, but in no spirit of slavery; he is not a slave, but a son.

The Filial Spirit is, secondly, the spring of buoyancy in the face of present disheartenment and pain. If sons, then heirs; the Spirit is the actual ἀπαρχή, the first incoming of the inheritance of final redemption, the redemption even of our physical being, when the sons of God will at last be seen as they really are. The Spirit, then, is at once the motive power of moral regeneration now, and the first instalment—ἀρραβών—of consummated salvation hereafter.

To adequately work out this theme would far transcend our limits. I would ask you to combine with this chapter the other and earlier *locus classicus* on the Holy Spirit as the dominant factor of the Christian life in 1 Corinthians ii. 6-16. The two passages have much in common; *e.g.*, the thought of the Spirit of God as mediating between the unsearchable consciousness of God and the dim, embarrassed, bewildered spirit of man even at his best, carrying up from man a prayer which transcends any thought he is able to articulate, bringing down from God the certainty of what God has in store for "them that love Him." The latter phrase is common to both passages; it is a thought St. Paul but rarely ventures to put into words; he dwells more frequently and by preference on the more constant certitude of God's love for us revealed in Christ.

I go no farther, but pause for one moment to draw attention to the individualism of St. Paul's treatment. He brings man to Christ through faith, assures him of peace with God, shows him that where flesh and blood, even under the illumination of God's law, cannot but fail,

he is now enabled to succeed; impresses upon him the double office of the Spirit as the restorer of the moral life and the guarantee of hope,—all without meaning except in so far as it is made a matter of individual experience. The soul, Christ, and God—these are the three great realities of the entire sequence of thought. The paradox of Law and Grace is held fast. What works in upon man from without cannot save him; the Spirit restores him, working outward from within. Direct access of the individual soul to God through Christ, direct control of the life by the inward light of the Spirit—"all taught of God"—that is St. Paul's ideal, and it is that of the prophets too (Jer. xxxi. 31 sq.).

The spiritual man is enthroned where none can challenge him: "He judgeth of all things, while he himself is judged of none." That is St. Paul's individualism, and to water it down is to miss the height of his ideal.

But it may be and has been misconceived and abused. Popes have externalised it, anabaptists have caricatured it. St. Paul does not say that the individual is the measure of all things, but that the *spiritual* man is judged of none—"the wind bloweth where it listeth." Such a principle is incapable of abuse, because abuse of it *ipso facto* marks us out as not spiritual. To violate God's Law shows that we are not under Grace. The freedom of the Christian from Law, the individualism of the spiritual man, are fundamental truths, but they are ideals. Far from being a charter to laxity or caprice, they demand not compliance, but transformation, and therefore are more exacting than any code, however strict in its prescriptions. To ignore these ideals is to open the door to some "working substitute"¹ for the Christianity of St. Paul. To presume upon them is to take "the highest room" in the feast of God, to claim "to be rich," and "to reign without" the Apostle.

¹ The phrase is from Archbishop Benson, *Christ and His Times*.

St. Paul asserts a true individualism, but he excludes the false. He has no express occasion to do this in the Epistle to the Romans. His passing cautions in viii. 1-10 are to be noted, also the obligations of the Christian toward the Church and toward the State in xii., xiii., and of the strong toward the weak in xiv.

But the essential limitation of St. Paul's individualism springs from the very root and source of that individualism itself. We can study it best in 1 Corinthians, where the principle is worked out twice over¹—in connexion with *εἰδωλόθυτα* and in connexion with the use of spiritual gifts. The keystone of the former subject is the chapter on Self-limitation (1 Cor. ix.), of the latter that on Charity (1 Cor. xiii.). If our freedom in Christ is real, we shall be foremost in building up His kingdom. But all church life, all social activity, is of this world unless it has its root in true individualism—in individual pardon, individual freedom in the Spirit, individual regeneration.

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¹ I hope to work this out more fully in a paper supplementary to this series.